

**U.S. Department of Education**  
**Washington, D.C. 20202-5335**

**APPLICATION FOR GRANTS**  
**UNDER THE**

**84-283B-1 FY24 Comprehensive Centers Program**

**CFDA # 84.283B**

**PR/Award # S283B240050**

**Grants.gov Tracking#: GRANT14193676**

OMB No. , Expiration Date:

Closing Date: Jun 24, 2024

PR/Award # S283B240050

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This application was generated using the PDF functionality. The PDF functionality automatically numbers the pages in this application. Some pages/sections of this application may contain 2 sets of page numbers, one set created by the applicant and the other set created by e-Application's PDF functionality. Page numbers created by the e-Application PDF functionality will be preceded by the letter e (for example, e1, e2, e3, etc.).

**Application for Federal Assistance SF-424**

\* 1. Type of Submission:

- ☐ Preapplication  
☒ Application  
☐ Changed/Corrected Application

\* 2. Type of Application:

- ☒ New  
☐ Continuation  
☐ Revision

\* If Revision, select appropriate letter(s):

\* Other (Specify):

\* 3. Date Received:

06/21/2024

4. Applicant Identifier:

5a. Federal Entity Identifier:

5b. Federal Award Identifier:

**State Use Only:**

6. Date Received by State:

7. State Application Identifier:

**8. APPLICANT INFORMATION:**

\* a. Legal Name:

McREL International

\* b. Employer/Taxpayer Identification Number (EIN/TIN):

430837728

\* c. UEI:

G568H8G8UZ11

**d. Address:**

\* Street1:

4601 DTC Boulevard, Suite 500

Street2:

\* City:

Denver

County/Parish:

\* State:

CO: Colorado

Province:

\* Country:

USA: UNITED STATES

\* Zip / Postal Code:

80237-2596

**e. Organizational Unit:**

Department Name:

Division Name:

**f. Name and contact information of person to be contacted on matters involving this application:**

Prefix:

\* First Name:

Nancy

Middle Name:

\* Last Name:

Taylor

Suffix:

Title:

Senior Development Manager

Organizational Affiliation:

McREL International

\* Telephone Number:

304-347-1863

Fax Number:

303-337-3005

\* Email:

ntaylor@mcrel.org

**Application for Federal Assistance SF-424****\* 9. Type of Applicant 1: Select Applicant Type:**

M: Nonprofit with 501C3 IRS Status (Other than Institution of Higher Education)

**Type of Applicant 2: Select Applicant Type:****Type of Applicant 3: Select Applicant Type:****\* Other (specify):****\* 10. Name of Federal Agency:**

Department of Education

**11. Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number:**

84.283

**CFDA Title:**

Comprehensive Centers

**\* 12. Funding Opportunity Number:**

ED-GRANTS-051324-001

**\* Title:**Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE): Program and Grantee Support Services:  
Comprehensive Centers Program, Assistance Listing Number 84.283B**13. Competition Identification Number:**

84-283B2024-1

**Title:**

84-283B-1 FY24 Comprehensive Centers Program

**14. Areas Affected by Project (Cities, Counties, States, etc.):**

1234-McREL\_Region8CC\_AreasAffectedbyProject

Add Attachment

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**\* 15. Descriptive Title of Applicant's Project:**

Region 8 Comprehensive Center (R8CC)

Attach supporting documents as specified in agency instructions.

Add Attachments

Delete Attachments

View Attachments



**Application for Federal Assistance SF-424****16. Congressional Districts Of:**\* a. Applicant \* b. Program/Project 

Attach an additional list of Program/Project Congressional Districts if needed.

**17. Proposed Project:**\* a. Start Date: \* b. End Date: **18. Estimated Funding (\$):**

* a. Federal	<input type="text" value="11,897,855.00"/>
* b. Applicant	<input type="text" value="0.00"/>
* c. State	<input type="text" value="0.00"/>
* d. Local	<input type="text" value="0.00"/>
* e. Other	<input type="text" value="0.00"/>
* f. Program Income	<input type="text" value="0.00"/>
* g. TOTAL	<input type="text" value="11,897,855.00"/>

**\* 19. Is Application Subject to Review By State Under Executive Order 12372 Process?**☒ a. This application was made available to the State under the Executive Order 12372 Process for review on ☐ b. Program is subject to E.O. 12372 but has not been selected by the State for review.☐ c. Program is not covered by E.O. 12372.**\* 20. Is the Applicant Delinquent On Any Federal Debt? (If "Yes," provide explanation in attachment.)**☐ Yes ☒ No

If "Yes", provide explanation and attach

**21. \*By signing this application, I certify (1) to the statements contained in the list of certifications\*\* and (2) that the statements herein are true, complete and accurate to the best of my knowledge. I also provide the required assurances\*\* and agree to comply with any resulting terms if I accept an award. I am aware that any false, fictitious, or fraudulent statements or claims may subject me to criminal, civil, or administrative penalties. (U.S. Code, Title 18, Section 1001)**

☒ \*\* I AGREE

\*\* The list of certifications and assurances, or an internet site where you may obtain this list, is contained in the announcement or agency specific instructions.

**Authorized Representative:**Prefix:  \* First Name: Middle Name: \* Last Name: Suffix: \* Title: \* Telephone Number:  Fax Number: \* Email: \* Signature of Authorized Representative:  \* Date Signed:

## **Areas Affected by the Region 8 Comprehensive Center**

---

Colorado

Kansas

Missouri

Nebraska

North Dakota

South Dakota

Wyoming

## **Congressional Districts for the Region 8 Comprehensive Center**

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Colorado (CO-ALL)\*

Kansas (KS-ALL)

Missouri (MO-ALL)

Nebraska (NE-ALL)

North Dakota (ND-ALL)

South Dakota (SD-ALL)

Wyoming (WY-ALL)\*

*\* The in-region offices will be located in Denver, Colorado and Cheyenne, Wyoming.*

**CERTIFICATION REGARDING LOBBYING**

## Certification for Contracts, Grants, Loans, and Cooperative Agreements

The undersigned certifies, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

(1) No Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid, by or on behalf of the undersigned, to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of an agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with the awarding of any Federal contract, the making of any Federal grant, the making of any Federal loan, the entering into of any cooperative agreement, and the extension, continuation, renewal, amendment, or modification of any Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement.

(2) If any funds other than Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," in accordance with its instructions.

(3) The undersigned shall require that the language of this certification be included in the award documents for all subawards at all tiers (including subcontracts, subgrants, and contracts under grants, loans, and cooperative agreements) and that all subrecipients shall certify and disclose accordingly. This certification is a material representation of fact upon which reliance was placed when this transaction was made or entered into. Submission of this certification is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required certification shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than \$10,000 and not more than \$100,000 for each such failure.

## Statement for Loan Guarantees and Loan Insurance

The undersigned states, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

If any funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this commitment providing for the United States to insure or guarantee a loan, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities," in accordance with its instructions. Submission of this statement is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required statement shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than \$10,000 and not more than \$100,000 for each such failure.

**\* APPLICANT'S ORGANIZATION**

McREL International

**\* PRINTED NAME AND TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE**

Prefix: Ms. \* First Name: Nancy Middle Name:

\* Last Name: Taylor Suffix:

\* Title: Senior Development Manager

**\* SIGNATURE:** Nancy M Taylor**\* DATE:** 06/21/2024



## Abstract

An abstract is to be submitted in accordance with the following:

### 1. Abstract Requirements

- Abstracts must not exceed one page and should use language that will be understood by a range of audiences.
- Abstracts must include the project title, goals, and expected outcomes and contributions related to research, policy, and practice.
- Abstracts must include the population(s) to be served.
- Abstracts must include primary activities to be performed by the recipient.
- Abstracts must include subrecipient activities that are known or specified at the time of application submission.

For research applications, abstracts also include the following:

- Theoretical and conceptual background of the study (i.e., prior research that the investigation builds upon and that provides a compelling rationale for this study).
- Research issues, hypotheses and questions being addressed.
- Study design including a brief description of the sample including sample size, methods, principals, and dependent, independent, and control variables, as well as the approach to data analysis.

[Note: For a non-electronic submission, include the name and address of your organization and the name, phone number and e-mail address of the contact person for this project.]

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## You may now Close the Form

You have attached 1 file to this page, no more files may be added. To add a different file, you must first delete the existing file.

\* Attachment: 1237-McREL\_Region8CC\_Abstract.pdf

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## Project Abstract

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**Project Title:** Region 8 Comprehensive Center (R8CC)

**Goals:** The R8CC, proposed by **McREL International**, will provide high-quality, intensive capacity-building and technical assistance (TA) services to seven states (CO, KS, MO, NE, ND, SD, and WY) and their respective regional, Tribal, and local education agencies to address their identified high-leverage problems (HLPs). The R8CC will guide clients through use of a six-phase continuous improvement process (CIP) to select, implement, scale, and sustain evidence-based programs, practices, and interventions to improve student outcomes.

**Expected Outcomes.** In all R8CC states, long-term outcomes include increased opportunities and significant increases in achievement—especially for students with the greatest needs. CO will decrease the number of dropouts and increase on-time graduation rates among all student groups through career-connected learning and pathways to postsecondary success. Early literacy efforts in MO and NE will ensure that all students are proficient readers by the end of Grade 3. Intensive TA in KS, ND, and WY will increase teacher and leader retention at state, district, and school levels. In SD, the R8CC’s support to improve math outcomes and Native American students’ well-being will result in increased academic proficiencies and on-time graduation rates.

**Primary Activities:** The R8CC will apply a six-phase CIP that leverages *implementation science*, *adult learning principles*, and *systems change* to address the identified HLPs. The CIP reflects R8CC’s approach to capacity-building services that is designed to achieve increases in human, organizational, policy, and resource capacity at all education system levels and significantly advance state, regional, and local efforts to improve outcomes and opportunities for all students.

**Absolute Priority (AP):** AP 2, Regional Centers – R8CC. McREL’s exceptional approach to capacity building and TA addresses AP 2 and all program and application requirements.

## Project Narrative File(s)

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\* Mandatory Project Narrative File Filename:

[Add Mandatory Project Narrative File](#)

[Delete Mandatory Project Narrative File](#)

[View Mandatory Project Narrative File](#)

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To add more Project Narrative File attachments, please use the attachment buttons below.

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ALN #84.283B

## PROJECT NARRATIVE

**Submitted by:**

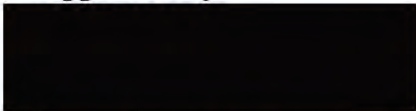
McREL International  
4601 DTC Boulevard, Suite 500  
Denver, CO 80237-2596

**Persons Authorized to Negotiate:**

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Susan Desch, Chief Financial Officer (CFO)  
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**Approved by:**



Bryan Goodwin, President & CEO

June 21, 2024

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*The following proposal responds to Absolute Priority 2, the Regional Centers Selection Criteria (SC), and the program and application requirements. The proposal narrative, except for SC-C, is organized by overall selection criteria and sub-criterion, for example, SC-A1. Specific program and application requirements (PR/AR) related to all centers (A) or regional centers (R) identified in the Notice Inviting Applications for the Comprehensive Centers Program (ALN #84.283B) are noted as A- or R-PR and A- or R-AR within the proposal narrative.*

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## Introduction

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McREL International, a private, nonprofit organization headquartered in Denver, Colorado and with a secondary office in Cheyenne, Wyoming, as well as staff in Kansas, Missouri, and South Dakota, is pleased to present this proposal for the Region 8 Comprehensive Center (R8CC) under Absolute Priority 2 (Regional Centers). McREL was founded in 1966 as an education research, development, and service organization serving the central U.S. region as a Regional Education Laboratory (REL). Our proposed approach for the R8CC draws on our extensive experience in this region as a trusted provider of research, evaluation, technical assistance (TA), capacity building, and coaching services, including 19 years serving as the prime contractor for CC Regions 11 and 12 (2019–2024) and the North Central CC (2005–2019) and 40-plus years operating REL Central (1966–2012).

We bring to this proposed work deep insights into the contexts, needs, and strengths of all seven states in the R8CC region. Our approach capitalizes on our existing strong relationships and work in the region solving high-leverage problems (HLPs) and our capacity to identify and respond to emerging needs by being able to “think globally and act locally.” We think globally by accessing a bench of nationally and regionally recognized experts adept at analyzing and applying evidence-based best practices from across the U.S. and around the world. We act locally by delivering services via a regionally based team of distinguished educators with recent experience guiding successful improvement efforts in state, regional, tribal, and local education agencies (SEAs, REAs, TEAs, and LEAs); the team includes a local school board member and others who have served as a deputy state superintendent, district superintendent, manager of school improvement supports in an urban district, curriculum coordinator, and a district special education coordinator.

To ensure that R8CC’s services improve educational opportunities and outcomes, close achievement gaps, and improve the quality of instruction for all students (particularly for students with the greatest needs), our proposed HLP teams will use an exceptional approach to capacity building that is grounded in two research-based principles:

1. The most direct way for school systems to improve student outcomes is improving the quality of teaching, learning, and leading (McKinsey & Co., 2024).
2. Sustainable improvements in teaching, learning, and leading are most apt to occur when they come from the “inside out.” Inside-out improvements occur when school systems:
  - (1) build on their bright spots; (2) translate evidence-based practices into co-created solutions that honor local context; (3) support deep change in educators’ practices with a team-based approach to professional learning (PL) and coaching grounded in the science of adult learning; and (4) ensure deep implementation of new practices through data-driven, plan-do-study-act (PDSA) cycles that foster a culture of continuous improvement (Bryk et al., 2015; Munby & Fullan, 2016).

In the pages that follow, and in our plans to help clients address their HLPs, we describe how McREL will support all seven Region 8 states with powerful, collaboratively designed solutions to improve outcomes in early literacy and math; strengthen working conditions in SEAs, LEAs, and schools; foster community support to enhance

#### Key Terminology

- **Client** = The organization with which the R8CC will enter into an agreement to provide capacity-building services (i.e., SEAs, REAs, TEA, or LEAs).
- **HLP Team** = The HLP teams for each state are comprised of McREL named staff members, staff from named partners or subcontractors (see terms below), our clients, and possibly others.
- **Partner** = Technical experts, which can be McREL staff or external contributors (e.g., staff from federally funded TA centers, equity assistance centers, or other centers), who will share their expertise with the HLP Teams but do not have budgeted time for the R8CC because they are funded through other fiscal sources.
- **R8CC Team** = McREL’s named R8CC staff and our subcontractors (see term below)
- **Recipients** = Organizations including, but not limited to, SEAs, REAs, TEAs, LEAs, and schools that are receiving intensive capacity-building services from the R8CC.
- **Stakeholders** = Any interested parties not currently engaged as a client or recipient.
- **Subcontractors** = External technical experts who have budgeted time for the R8CC and will be funded through the cooperative agreement.

students' well-being; and ensure all students experience relevant, career-connected learning and pathways to postsecondary success. We will build the capacity of educators to achieve these outcomes through our proven process for supporting deep, inside-out improvement for teaching, learning, and leading, contextualized with our deep insights into the region's strengths, needs, and opportunities for growth.

## McREL's Exceptional Approach to Intensive Capacity Building (SC-A)

McREL's approach to intensive capacity building is grounded in evidence and decades of experience supporting education agencies in the Central Region, across the nation, and internationally. In this section, we describe our approach to providing intensive capacity-building services. We describe the foundational elements of our exceptional approach, including how our asset-focused orientation influences our approach. We also present our strategy for addressing the TA needs in the region, including our logic model for the R8CC, a summary of key characteristics of the region, and a description of our proposed scope of services in each state. Together, our approach and strategy allows us to be both rigorous and flexible and positions us as the best candidate for delivering outstanding TA services to the Region 8 states.

### The R8CC Approach to Building Capacity (SC-A1)

Our approach to delivering high quality, relevant, and useful intensive capacity-building services is based on four interrelated elements: assemble the best teams, implement evidence-based approaches, engage in continuous improvement, and use an asset-focused lens (Figure 1). In this section, we describe how we will operationalize these beliefs for the R8CC to provide exceptional support.

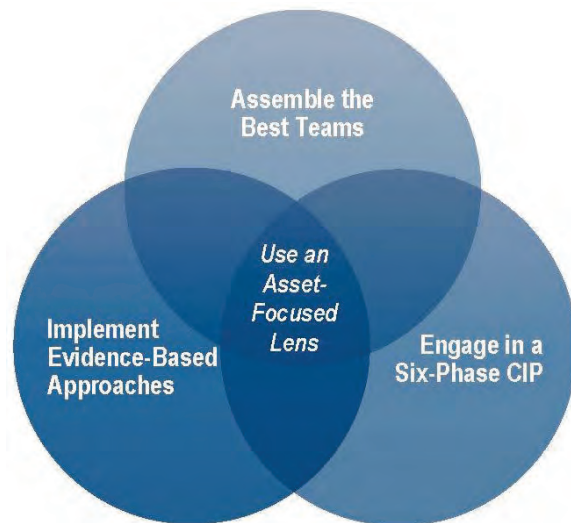


Figure 1. Our Exceptional Approach to Capacity Building

#### *Assemble the Best Teams*

Expert third-party agencies are a key driver of rapidly improving education systems, providing “targeted hands-on support” to help “share and integrate improvements” at multiple



levels (Mourshed et al., 2010, p. 58). We take an asset-focused lens to the concept of a third-party agency, expanding traditional conceptualizations to intentionally include valuable perspectives from local and Indigenous communities and stakeholders. Our operationalization of this vision for third-party support includes two interconnected teams to build capacity: the R8CC team and HLP teams.<sup>1</sup>

The proposed R8CC team, comprising McREL staff, consultants, and subcontractors, will be responsible for all elements of R8CC operations, from providing state clients and recipients with intensive capacity-building services to overseeing personnel management, project management, communications and dissemination, and performance management processes critical for effective TA. Our R8CC team includes vital contextual expertise via local, site-based staff, including a former chief state school officer (CSSO); a breadth of experience with implementation science and improvement science from the American Institutes for Research (AIR), Child Trends, and Mathematica; and a depth of experience in adult learning and systems change from McREL staff (see the R8CC's Subject-Matter and TA Expertise Section, p. 111). This selection was intentional to ensure complementary expertise and a shared commitment to the work and approach (e.g., a shared understanding of an asset-focused approach in the communities we serve) (Katzenbach & Smith, 2008).

Our R8CC team will offer intensive capacity-building services via eight HLP teams—one HLP team per SEA and one with the South Dakota Department of Tribal Relations (SDDTR). Each HLP team will be guided by two co-leads (see HLP Teams, p. 107) and include R8CC team members, SEA staff, the CCNetwork, and other partners (e.g., the Southwest Colorado Education Collaborative, schools, and institutions of higher education [IHEs]). The HLP teams

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<sup>1</sup> HLP teams include key R8CC staff, key SEA clients, and partners involved with the project.



will be responsible for designing and coordinating capacity-building services, making progress on the HLPs, and improving educational opportunities and outcomes, particularly for groups of students with the greatest need.

### *Implement Evidence-Based Approaches*

Our R8CC team brings a deep understanding of the research on adult learning principles, implementation science, improvement science, and systems change frameworks. In this section, we share how research from these disciplines guides our approach.

**How Adult Learning Strategies Inform Our Capacity-Building Approach.** Recognizing that traditional approaches to capacity building often do little to change practice (Jacob & McGovern, 2015; Sims et al., 2021), we draw upon research and evidence in the development of capacity-building activities. We leverage various domains such as brain-based instructional design (Goodwin & Rouleau, 2024), PL research (Garrett et al., 2021), and adult learning principles (Knowles et al., 2015) to create a truly exceptional, contextually aligned approach to adult learning that reflects the following key principles:

- Engaging with professionals as partners (Merriam, 2018).
- Framing learning around adults' problems of practice (Knowles et al., 2015).
- Involving recipients in setting and tracking goals for learning (Edinger, 2017).
- Providing clear, tangible examples of best practices (Guskey & Yoon, 2009).
- Supporting the application of learning with coaching (Kretlow & Bartholomew, 2010).
- Providing opportunities to reflect in communities of practice (Garet et al., 2011).

**How Implementation Science Informs Our Capacity-Building Approach.** Because systemic change efforts often fail due to poor implementation, we incorporate several evidence-based practices from implementation science into our capacity-building approach. We know that

inattention to these practices can lead all initiatives to fail, even evidence-based programs, practices, and interventions (EBPPIs), so we help our clients incorporate these practices throughout the implementation process—from exploration through full implementation—positioning them to ensure that *knowing* better translates into *doing* better. These practices include: measure readiness, focus on “usable innovations,” develop feedback mechanisms, and provide leadership.

***Measure Readiness.*** Leaders often overestimate the readiness of stakeholders to implement best practices, so we build our clients’ capacity to assess stakeholder receptivity to new practices, sizing up “what is needed and when” (Bussey et al., 2014, p. 163).

***Focus on “Usable” Innovations.*** In many contexts, the EBPPIs most likely to be effective are not the most complex or comprehensive, but rather, those that are “teachable, learnable, and assessable” (Blase et al., 2018). Thus, we help our clients focus on doing the right work well, and avoid doing many things poorly.

***Develop Feedback Mechanisms.*** Effective implementation requires a “regular flow of reliable information” about the practices that are being applied and the outcomes they are achieving (Fixsen et al., 2005, p. 12). Accordingly, we help our clients weave regular data collection, monitoring, and evaluation into their efforts.

***Provide Adaptive Leadership to Overcome Difficult Challenges.*** Leadership is a critical driver of implementation, in particular, the ability to support changes initiatives (Heifetz et al., 2009). Thus, we build our clients’ capacity to learn from the past and operationalize success as circumstances change and new challenges arise.

***How Improvement Science Informs Our Capacity-Building Approach.*** Improvement science differs from implementation science by focusing on creating learning organizations that

examine the impact of practices with specific groups (Leeman et al., 2021). Our approach incorporates four important practices from improvement science: see the system that produces outcomes, focus on the end user, solve the right problem, and drive improvement through inquiry.

***See the System That Produces Outcomes.*** All systems are intentionally or unintentionally designed to get the outcomes they produce, so we help our clients see the structures and conditions that produce current outcomes—both negative and positive (Bryk et al., 2015).

***Focus on the End User.*** We help those we support envision the ground-level changes needed to improve outcomes for specific groups to ensure the “work is problem-specific and user-centered” (Bryk et al., 2015, p. 21).

***Solve the Right Problem.*** We help system leaders avoid “*solutionitis* ... the propensity to jump quickly on a solution before fully understanding the exact problem to be solved” (Bryk et al., 2015, p. 24) by digging deep into their challenges to identify root causes.

***Drive Improvement Through Inquiry.*** We help our clients “learn by doing,” working with them to frame their initiatives as testable hypotheses (e.g., *If we want X outcomes, we must do Y*) and then engaging in PDSA cycles where they use data to test their hypotheses and make course corrections.

***How Systems-Change Frameworks Inform Our Capacity-Building Approach.*** Various systems change frameworks, such as the *Water of Systems of Change* (Kania et al., 2018), inform our approach to capacity building and to support clients struggling to navigate conditions of change across complex systems. For example, we support our clients in identifying the implicit elements of change that exist in their local context, such as people’s mental models (e.g., whether they bring a deficit model or asset-based orientation), and inform how they conduct a

needs assessment or respond to challenges (Chikoko et al., 2015; Kania et al., 2018). Another example of how systems change frameworks inform our approach is how we help clients recognize semi-explicit elements of change that exist in their local context, such as power dynamics (e.g., whether organizations are top-down or supportive of inside-out change)—and how these dynamics may hinder or support their ability to engage in the structural or explicit elements of change. Finally, central to any systems change framework is a process for reflecting, learning, and adapting that systematically generates new information that informs next steps in the improvement journey (Davidson & Morgan, 2018). This process of iterative inquiry enables a deeper understanding of the system, greater clarity about the complexity of challenges we are experiencing, exploration of opportunities to move forward, and action that reduces ambiguity and supports increased system coherence (Davidson & Morgan, 2018).

### *Engage in a Six-Phase Continuous Improvement Process (CIP)*

Originally used in the manufacturing industry (for example, define, measure, analyze, improve, and control [DMAIC]), continuous improvement processes have become more common in the education sector in the past decades as a way to systematically examine and improve services. Our six-phase CIP is grounded in several evidence-informed continuous improvement processes commonly used in the education sector, including the Active Implementation Review Network's (AIRN's) implementation stages and the five-step process in the U.S. Department of Education's (ED's) non-regulatory guidance on using evidence to strengthen education investments (ED, 2023). These alignments (shown in Table 1) demonstrate a rationale that R8CC supports will strengthen the capacity of our clients to engage in continuous improvement and achieve their intended short-, mid-, and long-term outcomes.

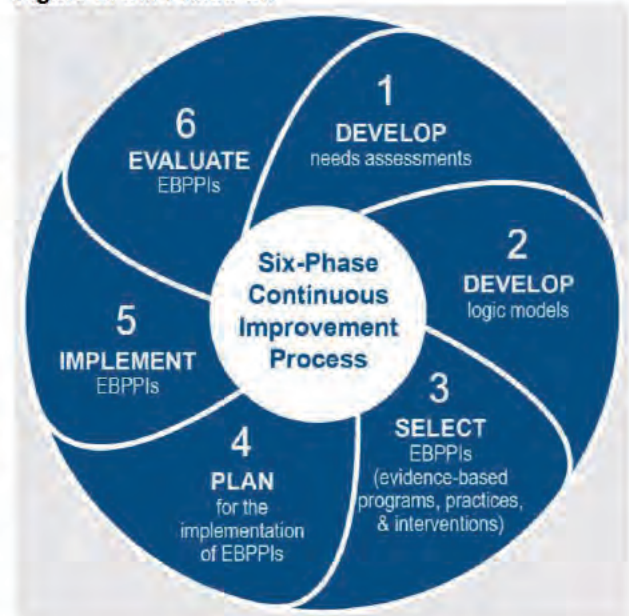


**Table 1. Alignment of the R8CC Phases of Implementation to Evidence-Based Continuous Improvement Processes**

R8CC Phases of Continuous Improvement	Alignment to Other Continuous Improvement Processes	
	Strengthening the Effectiveness of ESEA Investments	AIRN Implementation Stages
Develop needs assessment	Identify local needs	Exploration
Develop a logic model	Plan for implementation	Exploration
Select EBPPIs	Select relevant EBPPIs	Installation
Plan for the implementation of an EBPPI	Plan for implementation	Installation
Support the implementation of an EBPPI	Implement	Initial implementation, full implementation
Evaluate an EBPPI	Examine and reflect	Initial implementation, full implementation

Note. ESEA = Elementary and Secondary Education Act; Sources: AIRN, 2019; ED, 2023

We view the six-phase CIP as iterative (see Figure 2), though not necessarily sequential. For example, during the planning phase (Phase 4), an HLP team might identify a need to revise their project logic model (Phase 2). In our role as a mediator for change in Region 8, we recognize that attention to each phase of the six-phase CIP is as important as our professional and content knowledge. As such, the sections below summarize our approach to each of the six phases.

**Figure 2. Six-Phase CIP**

**CIP Phase 1: Develop Needs Assessments.** Although our 5-year service plans reflect information from initial needs sensing, we know that assessing needs is not a one-time event. As such, we will regularly assess needs, at least semi-annually, as part of our six-phase CIP to help our HLP teams “identify, understand, and prioritize the needs ... [to] address to improve performance” (Cuiccio & Husby-Slater, 2018, p. 1). We will collaboratively conduct the needs assessments with relevant groups and include information from primary data collection (e.g.,

interviews, focus groups, and surveys), as well as extant data (e.g., standardized assessment results, behavior data, school climate data, graduation rates, educator effectiveness data, and retention rates) from various sources as recommended by the State Support Network’s Framework for Assessing Needs (Cuiccio & Husby-Slater, 2018). Additionally, we will use techniques such as fishbone diagrams and “5 Whys” to conduct root cause analyses, ensuring all partners know “what the results are and ... [understand] the importance of those results and how they will be used to impact implementation” (Cuiccio & Husby-Slater, 2018, p. 7). Our needs assessments will also examine readiness, an important precursor of systemic change which, beyond content expertise, recognizes “what is needed and when” (Bussey et al., 2014, p. 163). As described in our evaluation plan, our readiness assessment examines willingness (motivation) and ability (foundational capacity and intervention-specific capacity) to implement programs and practices (McREL, 2019). Devoting adequate time to needs assessments—sometimes called the “exploration phase”—is critical (Fixsen et al., 2013; Romney et al., 2014). Notably, we will use an asset-focused orientation for these needs-sensing efforts—looking for not only challenges and needs, but also strengths and successes to build on and scale up. Research shows that identifying and building on existing positive outliers in systems accelerates sustainable outcomes in a variety of settings (e.g., Sternin, 2017), including school improvement efforts in under-resourced communities (e.g., Chikoko et al., 2015; Paek, 2008; Yosso, 2005).

**CIP Phase 2: Develop Logic Models.** Logic models are critical to project planning, implementation, and evaluation (MacDonald, 2018), helping educators and leaders think more precisely about current improvement efforts, develop a shared understanding, and monitor implementation. As such, we will use findings from the needs assessments to help each HLP team create a logic model to guide the selection of EBPPs and then plan, implement, and

evaluate the implementation of the EBPI. Logic models will form the foundation of our annual service plans, which will also include an associated project management plan to help guide the implementation process.

Our approach to co-creating logic models obviates some common critiques: we ensure that our clients’ understandings, terminology, and vision are represented (MacDonald, 2018) and we jointly develop, review, and revise logic models—which we consider living documents—at least every quarter (Hoggarth & Comfort, 2010). The R8CC logic model (see Figure 3) reflects the six-phase CIP specified in ED’s cycle of continuous learning and improvement. This cycle is designed to support activities that will improve outcomes for all students and serves as the framework for our formative and summative evaluation activities (ED, 2023). While the logic model has a traditional layout, we also use visual design elements and alternate displays to make our logic models accessible and meaningful for our clients and stakeholders and to reflect the dynamic nature of the work (Azzam et al., 2013).

**CIP Phase 3: Select EBPIs.** Selecting EBPIs as part of the R8CC’s CIP includes a key insight from improvement science—namely, doing a few things well yields better outcomes than doing many things poorly (Driscoll, 2008). The R8CC team brings substantial expertise in helping practitioners interpret research and select “evidence-based *project component(s)*” aligned to identified needs (ED, 2023, p. 6). We are experienced, for example, in leveraging tools like the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC), WWC Practice Guides, and the U.S. Department of Labor’s Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research to support partners in the identification and selection of aligned EBPIs. Selecting EBPIs “that are supported by the most rigorous evidence available” while “consider[ing] the needs of the learner population being served ... [and] ability and capacity of the organization to implement” (ED, 2023, p. 7) is a



necessary component of successful CIP implementation. This systematic approach will support conditions in which practitioners “are more likely to implement interventions successfully” (ED, 2016, p. 4). After selecting EBPPIs, we revisit the logic models with the HLP teams, supporting them as they integrate formative and summative indicators aligned to the selected EBPPI.

**CIP Phase 4: Plan for Implementation of EBPPIs.** Implementing an EBPPI is more than a matter of applying a new practice in a SEA, LEA, school, or classroom. When three key “implementation drivers”—training and coaching, a supportive environment, and effective leadership—are in place, nearly 80% of EBPPIs reach “full implementation” (more than half of educators using the practice as intended with positive student outcomes) within 3 years (Fixsen et al., 2001; 2019). Conversely, when any of these drivers are missing or deficient, only 14% of interventions reach full implementation (Fixsen et al., 2001; 2019). Additionally, evidence demonstrates that EBPPIs may be more effective if they are intentionally adapted to meet the needs of specific groups (Lee et al., 2008). Thus, to adapt EBPPIs for the given context we will use systematic approaches such as the seven-step process in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration’s toolkit (2022).

**CIP Phase 5: Implement EBPPIs.** In recent years, the education community has come to recognize the importance of implementation to the success—or failure—of an innovation. While the strength of the theoretical and/or experimental evidence that supports an EBPPI is critical, equally important is understanding the context—for example, educator, student, and community beliefs, behaviors, and values—and ensuring implementation drivers are in place. To facilitate successful implementation, we will assist clients in identifying PL, strengthening organizational supports, and supporting leadership practices that address technical and adaptive challenges (implementation drivers, Fixsen et al., 2018). We also will facilitate data-based, reflective

conversations about fidelity and preliminary indicators, encouraging the HLP teams to revisit their assumptions and revise the logic models and annual service plans as necessary. Park and colleagues (2013) define improvement science as seeking “to discern what works for addressing a particular problem, for whom, and under what set of specific conditions” (p. 4). As such, when implementing an EBPI to address an identified need, the focus should be on scientific “trial and learning” (Ryan Jackson et al., 2018, p. 24) such as PDSA cycles, an iterative process which supports reflection about how to use EBPIs more effectively. PDSA cycles support learning about innovations—when they work, why they work, and how to deliver them with increasing precision. PDSAs and reflective conversations are key components of implementation and also inform the evaluation of EBPIs.

**CIP Phase 6: Evaluate Implementation of EBPIs.** Although presented as a distinct process, **formative evaluation** of EBPIs will begin during the needs assessment phase and continue throughout the six-phase CIP. McREL’s R8CC team will dedicate a staff member with evaluation expertise (the internal evaluator) to each HLP team, ensuring the teams have timely access to evaluation support. This is because evaluation is *not the final* phase of implementation, but rather part of our six-phase CIP that helps HLP teams learn, reflect, and improve. Formative evaluation supports include helping the HLP teams select appropriate indicators; collect and interpret data; engage in data-based, reflective conversations; and revise the logic models and annual service plans to reflect formative learnings. Equally important is attention to **summative evaluation**, which focuses on whether outcomes have been achieved. Summative evaluation supports include helping the HLP teams identify appropriate data sources and analysis methods and implement objective interpretation processes.

### *Use an Asset-Focused Lens*

Research paints an unflattering picture of large-scale improvement efforts, many of which fail to translate into sustainable improvements in teacher practices or student outcomes (Bryk, et al., 2015; Fullan, 2016; McKinsey & Co., 2024; Wallace et al., 2008). Our approach to building capacity and creating sustainable change includes understanding the current context and building on local successes. Identifying and building on existing positive outliers in systems accelerates sustainable outcomes (Sternin, 2017), including school improvement efforts in under-resourced communities (Chikoko et al., 2015; Paek, 2008; Yosso, 2005). So, even as we work with systems to assess what is going *wrong*, we look for what is going *right*—counterexamples to identified needs. For example, if student disengagement is a challenge, in which courses, classrooms, or activities are students more engaged? What conditions made such “bright spots” possible?

### *Our Strategy for Addressing Technical Assistance (TA) Needs in Region 8*

Our strategy to address the TA needs in Region 8 is based on four interrelated elements: (1) our rigorous and flexible approach to capacity building, (2) our logic model, which operationalizes our approach, (3) our deep knowledge of the region, and (4) our planned scope of services, created after needs sensing and consultation with national and state education leaders. In this section, we describe how we will use this strategy to address the Region 8 states’ TA needs.

**Our Exceptional Approach Builds Capacity.** Positive, durable change is not easy. As described above, lasting systemic change involves not just policies, practices, and resources (the explicit), but also relationships and power dynamics (the semi-explicit) and mental models (the implicit) (Kania et al., 2018). Thus, our intensive capacity-building approach is designed in



recognition of these factors (Figure 1). Our HLP teams include local, site-based leadership to ensure our services are timely and relevant, and to maintain deep, trusted relationships with clients and recipients. We focus on quality through our deep knowledge of evidence-based approaches, including adult learning principles, implementation science, improvement science, and systems change frameworks, as well as deep knowledge of and experience with EBPPI adaptation and implementation. We model our approach through intentional use of our six-phase CIP (see Figure 2) to support redesign and refinement. We also use an asset-focused lens to understand and build on existing strengths. Overall, we believe this approach is the best way to help clients engage in continuous improvement; build capacity in four interconnected dimensions: human capacity, organizational capacity, policy capacity, and resource capacity (Table 2); and achieve intended short-, mid-, and long-term outcomes.

**Table 2. The Four Dimensions of Capacity Building**

Capacity Dimension	Capacity Definition
<b>Human Capacity</b>	The development or improvement of individual knowledge, skills, technical expertise, and ability to adapt and be resilient to policy and leadership changes.
<b>Organizational Capacity</b>	Structures that support clear communication and a shared understanding of an organization's visions and goals, and delineated individual roles and responsibilities in functional areas.
<b>Policy Capacity</b>	Structures that support alignment, differentiation, or enactment of local, state, and federal policies and initiatives.
<b>Resource Capacity</b>	Tangible materials and assets that support alignment and use of federal, state, private, and local funds.

### ***Logic Model Supporting the R8CC's Approach to Capacity Building (A-AR5)***

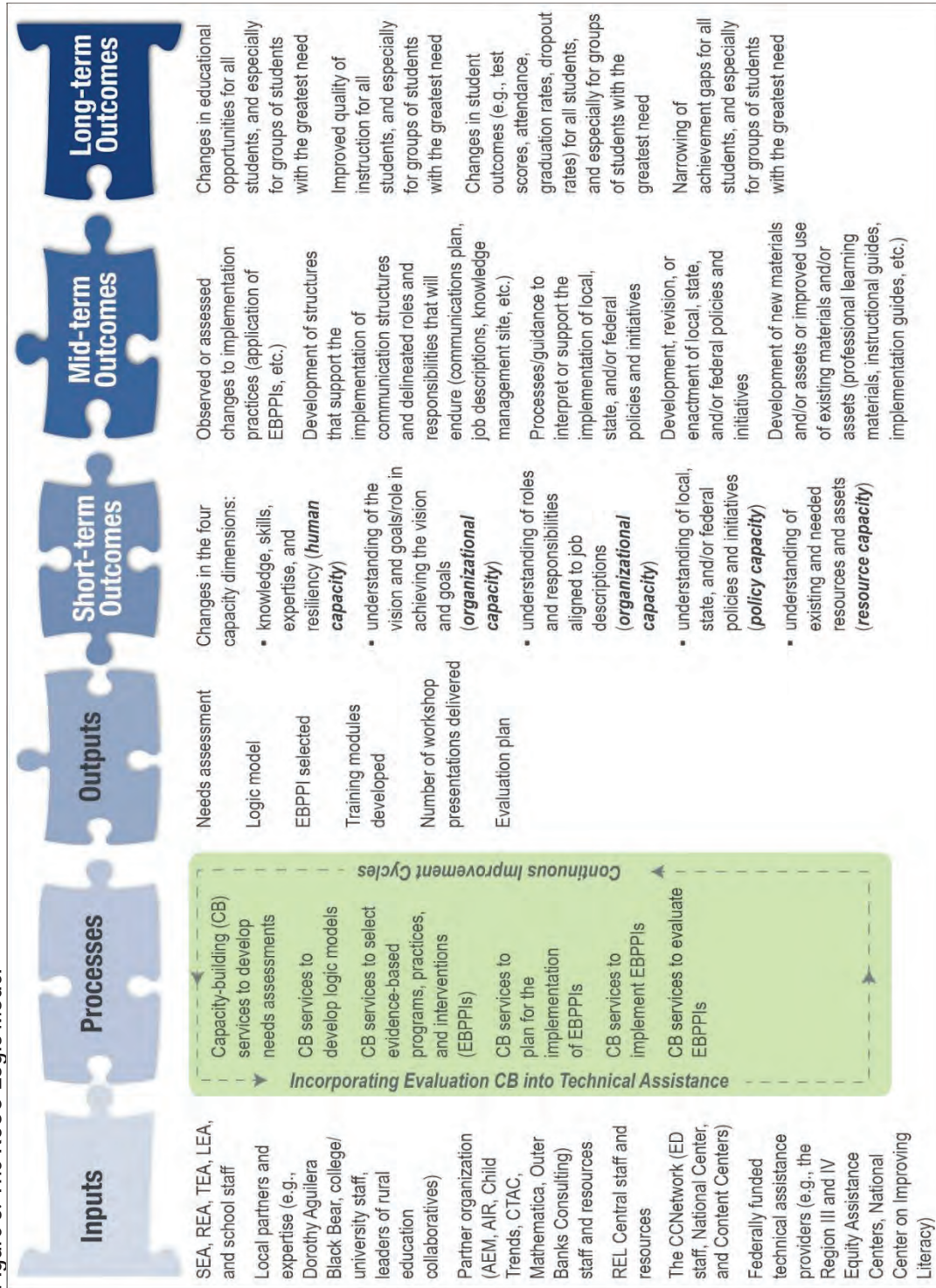
The R8CC logic model (shown in Figure 3 on p. 18) reflects the six-phase CIP specified in ED's cycle of continuous learning and improvement designed to improve outcomes for all students and reflects the underlying rationale for our capacity-building. By assembling a strong team of capable local and national experts skilled in adult learning, implementation science, improvement science, and systems change frameworks (inputs); using a six-phase CIP to guide HLP work (processes); and providing capacity-building services to clients and recipients

(resulting in outputs), our proposed R8CC will build knowledge and skills (short-term outcomes) across the four capacities (human, organizational, resource, and policy); support the application of that knowledge and skills to address HLPs (mid-term outcomes); and lead to improved outcomes for all educators and students, especially for students from groups with the greatest need (long-term outcomes). Using a holistic approach, we consider the interrelationships, perspectives, boundaries, and dynamics (Systems in Evaluation Topical Interest Group of the American Evaluation Association, 2018), to ensure the inputs, processes, outputs, timelines, and outcomes are appropriate and achievable. This logic model also serves as the framework for our formative and summative evaluation activities (ED, 2023). For example, we will collect continuous improvement data to improve processes and shift direction (when necessary), and provide information about the quality, relevance, and usefulness of the outputs (formative evaluation). Our summative evaluation will focus on whether the long-term outcomes have been achieved.

**Relationships and Linkages Among Variables and Empirical Support for Our Framework.** Our logic model includes the six-phase CIP as the foundation of our approach to change. Although research on the outcomes of continuous improvement processes in the education sector is limited, continuous improvement “holds promise for supporting change in education” (Shakman et al., 2020, p. 3). As described in our narrative, in recognition of the role of culture and context, and the importance of “constant adaptation, data collection, and learning” (Shakman et al., 2020, p. 1), the phases in our continuous improvement cycle are iterative and are not necessarily consecutive.



Figure 3. The R8CC Logic Model



Note. Outputs are samples aligned to each stage of the capacity-building cycle. Consistent with the Federal Register notice, short-term outcomes are the effects of clients and recipients receiving capacity-building services after 1 year; mid-term outcomes are those effects after 2–3 years, and long-term outcomes are those effects after 4–5 years. Students with the greatest need include students from low-income families and students attending schools implementing comprehensive support and improvement or targeted or additional targeted support and improvement activities under Section 1111(d) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (ESEA).

## Our Understanding of the Region 8 States & Their Needs (SC-A2 & A-AR2)

The R8CC will serve seven states—Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming. On the surface, the states are similar (Table 3); combined, the states serve 6.2% of the nation’s students; ranging from 0.2% in Wyoming to 1.9% in Missouri. When compared to students across the U.S., students in the Region 8 states are more likely to be White, native speakers of English, and less likely to be eligible for free or reduced-price meals (FRPMs). In Region 8 states, apart from Colorado, the percentage of students attending schools classified as rural exceeds the national average. While per-pupil expenditures are lower than the national average in most Region 8 states, North Dakota slightly exceeds that rate and, in Wyoming, the per-pupil expenditure is approximately \$3,000 more than the national average.

Similarly, while the majority of the Region 8 states are at or above the nation on common Grade 4 and Grade 8 academic achievement metrics (National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP], see Table 4), two states (Kansas and Missouri) are below average in Grade 8 math, and have seen declining performance since the pandemic. Graduation rates in three states (Colorado, South Dakota, and Wyoming) are also below the national average (see Table 4). While NAEP results show that students in several Region 8 states are falling behind their peers, students in most states perform at or above the national average on most measures.

Recently, many state legislatures in the region have debated public policies, and some states have passed laws that intend to improve literacy and are aligned to the science of reading (e.g., Kansas S.B. 438 passed in 2024, Missouri S.B. 681 passed in 2023, Nebraska’s Reading Improvement Act of 2018, Chapter 15 [Curriculum and Testing] of North Dakota’s Century Code in 2021, and South Dakota H.B. 1022 in 2024). Through recent needs-sensing conversations, some CSSOs expressed their desire to bring a similar statewide policy initiative—



Table 3. Key Characteristics of Region 8 States

	National	Colorado	Kansas	Missouri	Nebraska	North Dakota	South Dakota	Wyoming
Number of PreK–12 students <sup>a</sup>	47,305,808	870,871	484,490	892,246	329,234	118,513	141,888	92,467
Percentage of students in the nation served by state <sup>a</sup>	N/A	1.8%	1.0%	1.9%	0.7%	0.3%	0.3%	0.2%
Average pupil/teacher ratio <sup>b</sup>	16.0	16.3	12.9	12.8	13.8	12.4	13.8	12.7
Percentage of schools classified as rural <sup>c</sup>	28.4%	24.4%	45.2%	41.7%	51.4%	68.4%	75.2%	52.0%
Average per student expenditure <sup>d</sup>	\$17,013 <sup>e</sup>	\$13,931	\$14,563	\$13,665	\$15,628	\$17,241	\$12,108	\$20,659
Percentage of minority students <sup>f</sup>	55.0%	49.2%	38.1%	31.5%	36.7%	26.3%	29.2%	23.2% <sup>g</sup>
Percentage of students eligible for FRPMs <sup>h</sup>	48.6%	38.3%	43.2%	43.9%	41.3%	21.9%	28.7%	28.3%
Percentage of English learners (ELs) <sup>i</sup>	10.6%	10.4%	8.0%	3.8%	7.3%	3.3%	4.6%	2.7%

Notes. <sup>a</sup> Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/ipeds/datacenter/tablegenerator.aspx?savedTableID=649123>; <sup>b</sup> Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/ipeds/datacenter/tablegenerator.aspx?savedTableID=649123>; <sup>c</sup> Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/ipeds/datacenter/tablegenerator.aspx?savedTableID=649123>; <sup>d</sup> Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/ipeds/datacenter/tablegenerator.aspx?savedTableID=649123>; <sup>e</sup> Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/ipeds/datacenter/tablegenerator.aspx?savedTableID=649123>; <sup>f</sup> Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/ipeds/datacenter/tablegenerator.aspx?savedTableID=649123>; <sup>g</sup> Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/ipeds/datacenter/tablegenerator.aspx?savedTableID=649123>; <sup>h</sup> Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/ipeds/datacenter/tablegenerator.aspx?savedTableID=649123>; <sup>i</sup> Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/ipeds/datacenter/tablegenerator.aspx?savedTableID=649123>.

Table 4. Key Student Outcomes in Region 8 States

	National Average	Colorado	Kansas	Missouri	Nebraska	North Dakota	South Dakota	Wyoming
Average four-year cohort graduation rate <sup>a</sup>	87%	82%	88%	90%	88%	89%	84%	82%
Percentage of graduates going directly to college <sup>b</sup>	63.7%	58.0%	61.9%	59.3%	62.6%	61.2%	69.3%	56.1%
Average 4th grade NAEP score: math <sup>c</sup>	235	236	235	232	242	240	239	243
Average 4th grade NAEP score: reading <sup>c</sup>	216	223	215	213	219	218	218	225
Average 8th grade NAEP score: math <sup>c</sup>	273	275	272	272	279	278	281	281
Average 8th grade NAEP score: reading <sup>c</sup>	259	263	256	258	259	258	262	261

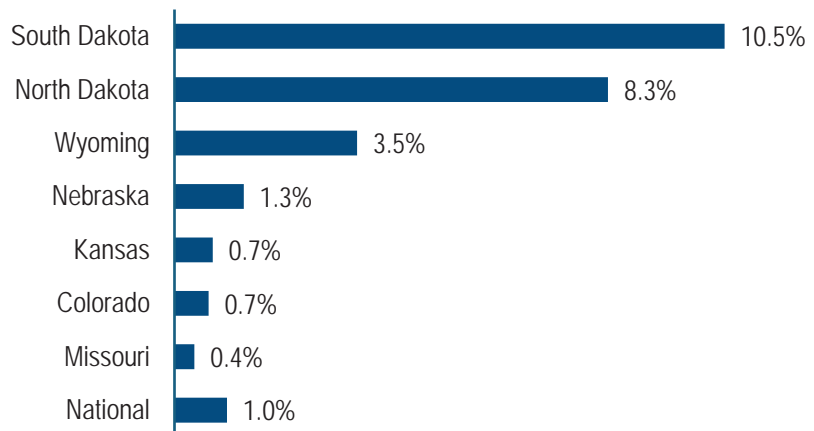
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a science of math—to mandate improvements in math instruction. Although, to date, Colorado is the lone state that has debated or passed recent legislation aimed to improve math performance through a focus on training teachers to use evidence-informed practices (Schwartz, 2023).

Needs-sensing with leaders at the South Dakota Department of Education (SDDOE) identified improving math outcomes in Grades 4–8 as its HLP with R8CC support.

Although the outcomes highlighted in Table 4 show that some states are doing as well or better than the national average for math and reading, they do not reveal the entire picture for Region 8 students.

Figure 4. Percentage of Native American Students



Ranging from 0.4% in Missouri to 10.5% in

Note. Retrieved from [https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/profiles/stateprofile/overview/WY?sfj=NP&hort=1&sub=MAT&sj=WY&st=MN&year=2022R3&cti=PgTab\\_Demographics](https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/profiles/stateprofile/overview/WY?sfj=NP&hort=1&sub=MAT&sj=WY&st=MN&year=2022R3&cti=PgTab_Demographics) (2021–22 data)

South Dakota, four Region 8 states serve a larger percentage of Native American<sup>2</sup> students than the national average (Figure 4). Region 8 is also home to four of the largest American Indian reservations in the U.S.: the Cheyenne River Reservation, Pine Ridge Reservation, Standing Rock Reservation, and Wind River Reservation. Reservations are frequently located in rural, isolated areas and experience some of the highest poverty rates in the country (Native American Aid, 2015). Native Americans are more likely to also experience health complications and violence, and Native American students have the highest dropout rate among any student group (Godfrey, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> We use the terms “American Indian” and “Native American” in this proposal, following each state’s convention.



Gaps on NAEP scores between Native American students and their peers are of particular note (see Figures 5–8). In Region 8 states with more than 1% Native American student populations (Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming) and for which NAEP reporting standards were met, Native American students perform lower than the national average, with declining performance over the past 2–4 years, except for Grade 4 reading in North Dakota. The Nation’s Report Card shows that these gaps are similar for other student groups (e.g., English learners [ELs] and students receiving special education services; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2022d).

Figure 5. Grade 4 NAEP: Reading

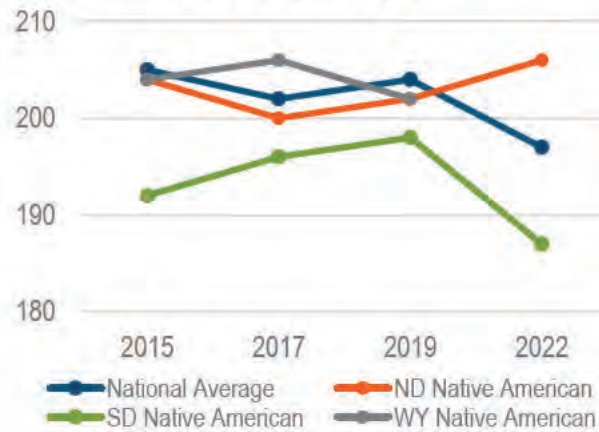


Figure 6. Grade 8 NAEP: Reading

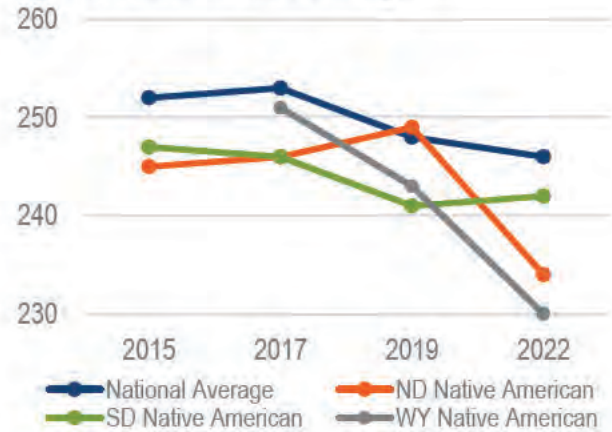


Figure 7. Grade 4 NAEP: Mathematics

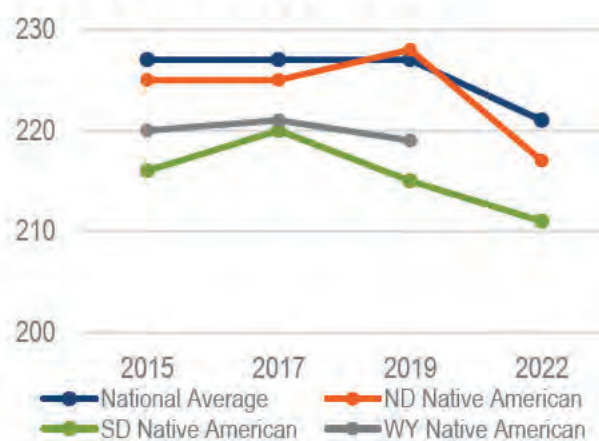
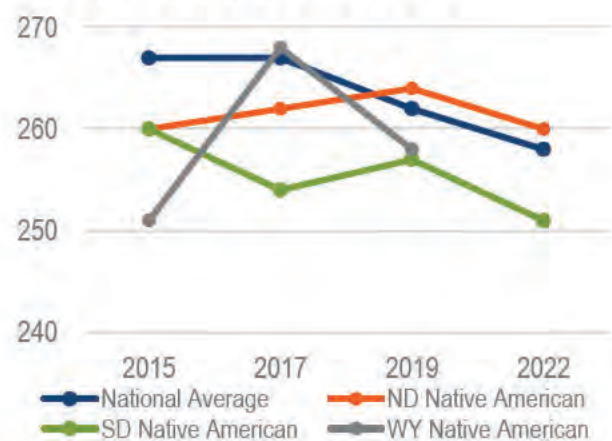


Figure 8. Grade 8 NAEP: Mathematics



Note for Figures 5–8. Retrieved from <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ndecore/landing> (2015–22 data). The reporting threshold was not met for WY Native American students in 2022.

### *Central Regional Advisory Committee (RAC)*

The Central RAC, established to provide advice and recommendations to the Secretary of Education regarding educational needs in Region 8, met between August and November 2023. The Central RAC identified two issues that all states in the region must address: (1) a decline in student academic achievement, as evidenced by NAEP scores; and (2) a decline in student well-being, which was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (ED, Central RAC, 2023). The RAC committee emphasized that a lack of qualified educators directly impacts the quality of education students receive and efforts to attract, train, and retain high-quality teachers and educators should be prioritized. The RAC report also emphasized that a focus on enhanced mental health and well-being supports must also attend to the needs of culturally diverse populations in the Central Region. The R8CC's proposed TA and capacity-building services for each identified state HLP intentionally addresses these identified priority needs.

### *State Educational Context*

Although the challenges may be similar, each state has distinct political, geographical, and cultural contexts that affect students' K–12 experiences, thus requiring a tailored approach to improvement. These differences are exemplified in the approaches Region 8 states take to serving small, rural LEAs. All seven states have REAs that support LEAs, particularly rural LEAs, with education services. However, these agencies are structured and operate differently from state to state. For example, Nebraska's 19 REAs, known as Educational Service Units (ESUs), have a formalized council to coordinate services with the SEA to ensure district supports are aligned and efficient. This council also ensures that stakeholders are aware of available supports. The ESUs provide 241 services across several areas (educational opportunities and access, education effectiveness, and leadership) and are organized in a central database, the

Service Implementation Model Process and Log (SIMPL; Nebraska ESU Coordinating Council, 2024). North Dakota's seven REAs operate similarly to Nebraska, coordinating services through an association that serves more than 121,000 students across the state's public, private, and Bureau of Indian Education schools (North Dakota Regional Education Association, 2023). The model in Missouri is less centralized and uses Regional Professional Development Centers (RPDCs) that are housed within IHEs, though the RPDCs are still tightly connected to the SEA and provide supports and services to LEAs in alignment with state initiatives.

Kansas' seven Educational Service Agencies (ESAs) and South Dakota's seven Education Cooperatives operate independently with little coordination among other regional agencies or with the SEA. These agencies enable LEAs to share costs and use economies of scale in a variety of areas, including professional services (e.g., business services) and content expertise (e.g., educator PL and special education services). Similarly, in Wyoming and Colorado, Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) supplement LEA support with services to reduce duplication, promote inter-district shared services, and assist LEAs in meeting expectations of mandated programs.

McREL understands the important role that REAs play in these states, and the value of engaging these agencies to support the R8CC's work. We intend to engage with REAs in a variety of ways that align to the unique structures of each state. For example, Missouri's RPDCs are home to literacy consultants who have supported the development of a common formative assessment by writing assessment items aligned to the Missouri Learning Standards (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], n.d.a) and provide LEAs with PL in literacy. We plan to partner with RPDC staff to execute key elements of R8CC's support for improving early literacy outcomes in Missouri. We will work with Kansas ESAs to build their



staff capacity as certified facilitators who can implement PL for superintendents with fidelity. The Nebraska and North Dakota REAs are directly involved in SEA-led school improvement efforts and will be key partners on our R8CC HLP teams.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), offers greater flexibility for states to determine their own accountability systems, and as a region known to embrace local control, this is important in the Region 8 states. Each state has determined what areas of focus will inform school improvement efforts and which agencies (e.g., the Kansas TA Systems Network) and programs (e.g., Missouri’s School Improvement Program 6 [MSIP6]) will provide support to schools that have been identified for comprehensive or targeted school improvement (CSI and TSI schools). Despite differences and a preference toward local control, the states all share goals to improve academic achievement in math and reading, improve graduation rates, and ensure all students are proficient in the English language.

### *Consulting with Stakeholders for Annual Service Plan Development (R-PR2)*

Throughout McREL’s decades of service to the region and, most recently, through our capacity building and TA services delivered by the current R11CC and R12CC, McREL staff have developed a nuanced understanding of the education landscape in the Region 8 states and built trusting relationships with the region’s education leaders, educators, and a broad range of stakeholders. We engaged in needs-sensing conversations with all seven CSSOs, the Secretary of Tribal Relations in South Dakota (the Region 8 state with the largest population of Native American students), and other SEA and LEA staff. We reviewed and incorporated components from relevant documents including the Central Region RAC report (ED, Central RAC, 2023), state ESEA consolidated plans, and state strategic plans. We also conducted ongoing needs

sensing with advisory boards, educators, students, and parents as part of our current work leading the R11CC and R12CC. These consultations with a broad range of stakeholders—which will be affirmed with additional needs sensing and commitments from clients and partners to carry out the service plans to be finalized within 90 days of the R8CC award—led us to identify HLPs reflecting the most tenacious problems in the region:

- Increasing academic achievement in literacy in Missouri and Nebraska, and math in South Dakota.
- Improving working conditions to attract and retain qualified teachers in North Dakota.
- Strengthening leadership to increase educational opportunities and outcomes in Kansas and Wyoming.
- Reducing dropout rates and increasing postsecondary success through engaging and career-connected pathways to graduation in Colorado.
- Improving Native American student wellness in South Dakota.

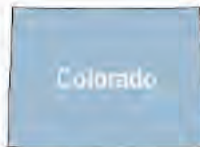
We present detailed plans for addressing these HLPs in our 5-year service plans that appear in the following pages.

### **Annual and 5-Year Service Plans (A-PRs1 & 2, R-PR3, A-AR1, & R-AR1)**

The R8CC 5-year service plans (Tables 7, 10, 13, 16, 19, 22, 25, & 28) were created to address the HLPs identified by chief education leaders and are further substantiated by multiple data sources, including standardized assessment scores, graduation rates, legislation, ESSA plans, SEA strategic plans, and broad stakeholder input from across Region 8. The service plans reflect our in-depth knowledge of each state's context and needs identified by our clients and stakeholders within the region, and will leverage existing successes, services, and expertise to ensure efficient service delivery and a context-relevant approach. We have letters of support and

commitment from a broad range of education groups, including CSSOs; university, REA, and LEA staff; and various community members, demonstrating support for our proposed services and the strength of our relationships in the R8CC service area (Appendix E). The plans reflect an intensive approach—our supports will be sustained over 5 years and will help our stakeholders through all phases of the CIP (i.e., developing needs assessments and logic models, and selecting, planning for, implementing, and evaluating EBPPIs) as they work to improve their persistent HLPs.

Within 90 days of award, our R8CC team will reconfirm priorities with our state clients, secure partnership agreements defining coordination and collaboration activities, and collaborate with the HLP teams to co-develop and update the annual service plans. Annual service plans will include logic models with detailed inputs; CIPs; outputs; and short-, mid-, and long-term outcomes. The annual service plans will also include a project management plan with information about milestones, timelines, evidence, and responsibilities to guide the implementation process. HLP-specific plans for communication and dissemination of products, recordings of webinars, events, and other outputs to be produced through the HLP teams' work will be collaboratively drafted with the R8CC communications team and confirmed with our clients as part of finalizing the service plans. Service plan implementation will be monitored by the R8CC's internal evaluator as part of monthly project review meetings and monitored semi-annually as part of reporting on Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) Measure 3—Fidelity of Implementation. Plans will be approved by the CSSO to ensure activities are aligned with state priorities, and HLP leads will provide the CSSOs with annual service plan status updates at least quarterly.



## Colorado's HLP: Expanding Graduation Options to Elevate Career and Postsecondary Success (A-PR2 & R-AR1)

Through the *Expanding Graduation Options* project, Colorado's HLP team will assist the Colorado Department of Education (CDE), LEAs, schools, and their local/regional partners to implement engaging and career-connected pathways that improve graduation rates and postsecondary readiness for all students, particularly for students from communities with the highest needs (e.g., in rural areas).

### Capacity-Building Services

- ESSA Connections: Title IV (activities to support well-rounded educational opportunities)
- RAC Central Priority: Student Achievement and Growth
- Raise the Bar: Postsecondary and Career Pathways

**HLP.** Following a slight dip of 0.2% (81.9% to 81.7%) from 2020 to 2021, Colorado's four-year graduation rate continues to rise, as it was doing prior to the pandemic. The Class of 2023 graduated at a rate of 82.3% (CDE, 2024b), meaning that roughly 11,500 students from their cohort did not graduate on time, and may never earn their diplomas. On-time graduation rates for groups of students with the greatest need—such as students from low-income households, or who are homeless or receiving foster care—as well as the rates of African American, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Hispanic students, all fell below the state average and far below the rate for White students, ranging from a gap of 9.4% for African American students to 51.8% for homeless youth (CDE, 2024b). Clearly, increasing graduation rates for all students, and particularly students from underserved groups, is a HLP in Colorado.

**Client Need.** For the past four years, the R12CC, operated by McREL, has collaborated with CDE's Office of Dropout Prevention and Student Re-Engagement to update and enhance the state's Dropout Prevention Framework (CDE, 2024a). Developed for use by district and school teams, the framework outlines nine EBPPIs to reduce dropout rates and increase student



engagement in learning, graduation rates, credit attainment, and preparation for postsecondary options. At its core, the framework is designed to help schools keep students engaged in and connected to school. **Students who feel connected to school are more likely to have better school attendance and graduate high school** (Niehaus et al., 2016). State Commissioner of Education Susana Córdova affirmed student engagement as a priority, noting that pathways for students to graduation and postsecondary readiness offer a way to address this need (personal communication, March 11, 2024). Other education leaders, school counselors, and groups from rural areas expressed similar concerns, including hope that their graduates would go on to work in their own communities.

**Graduation Pathways and Options for Students.** Pathways are structured academic opportunities that increase relevance of learning opportunities by aligning them to student interests and real-world postsecondary skills and goals (CDE, 2023). Providing students with rigorous and engaging career-connected learning opportunities has been shown to increase students' motivation to attend and engage in school (Dougherty, 2021). For students who are behind, pathways can provide a clear direction and needed scaffolds for high school graduation and postsecondary success (Frost, 2016; Rix, 2022).

With the development and implementation of the postsecondary workforce readiness Graduation Guidelines Menu of Options (CDE, 2021), CDE increased the number of ways in which high school graduates may demonstrate college and career readiness (CCR). The Menu of Options includes typical measures of reading, writing, communication, and math, such as ACT and AP exams, as well as concurrent enrollment and district capstone choice for students. What is missing from the menu are options that include experiential opportunities to explore potential careers, such as internships, apprenticeships, industry-sponsored projects, and supervised



entrepreneurship experiences (CDE, 2024c). These experiences are vital for learning through career-connected pathways and provide students with the unique opportunity to contextualize skills like reading, writing, communicating, and math.

**Capacity-Building Services.** To help Colorado schools and districts provide all students with meaningful and engaging pathways toward graduation and postsecondary success, the R8CC will support CDE to accomplish two goals:

1. Gain a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which students are demonstrating CCR that meet the state Graduation Guidelines' criteria, including ways not yet included as options (e.g., apprenticeships, internships, or local industry-sponsored projects).
2. Update the Graduation Guidelines Menu of Options and support districts and schools in designing and implementing new graduation pathways connected to meaningful career and education opportunities that engage students in learning, and provide a clear path to postsecondary success.

**Expected Outcomes.** Short-term outcomes for this 5-year project include (1) understanding the ways in which students are currently demonstrating CCR across the state (*human and organizational capacities*); and (2) clarifying and expanding the state's Graduation Guidelines Menu of Options that describe how students may demonstrate CCR (*policy capacity*). Mid-term outcomes include increasing the capacity of schools and districts to (1) design new options/pathways for students to demonstrate CCR (*human capacity*), and (2) develop systems and structures that support the implementation of new options/pathways for students to demonstrate CCR (*human and organizational capacity*). Finally, long-term outcomes will include (1) improved engagement for all students (as measured by a decrease in dropout rates),

especially for groups of students with the greatest need; and (2) increased on-time graduation rates for all students and all student groups.

**Project Leadership and Expertise.** Dr. Christina Lemon, who currently co-leads the R12CC dropout prevention work with CDE, and Dr. Richard Resendez, a proposed R8CC co-director, will lead this HLP project. Victoria Cirks and Sarah Frazelle—experts on student engagement, career pathways, and CCR from American Institutes for Research (AIR)—and Jessica Morrison, executive director of the Southwest Colorado Education Collaborative (SWCEC), who has led successful efforts to build strong career pathways for students across nine rural districts in partnership with local business and industry, will provide subject-matter and technical expertise.

Year 1, and anticipated services for Years 2–5, including milestones, outputs, and outcomes, are described next. Upon award of Region 8, McREL will re-engage with CDE leadership, regional and local educators, and interested business and community members to conduct additional needs sensing that will inform the finalized Year 1 service plan for Colorado.

**Planned Services for Year 1.** Table 5 describes the planned milestones and timelines the Colorado HLP team will complete in Year 1. Additional needs sensing to inform any changes or updates to the service plan will be completed within 90 days of the R8CC award.

**Table 5. Year 1 Milestones for Expanding Graduation Options to Elevate Career and Postsecondary Success**

Year 1 Milestones	Timeframe
Review relevant data and set a shared intention for the work, create a logic model for the project, finalize the annual service plan, and establish a communications plan.	Oct–Dec 2024
Complete a literature review of best practices across the U.S. for establishing multiple pathways to graduation that leverage career-connected learning and real-world postsecondary skills and goals.	Jan 2025
Conduct a landscape analysis among Colorado districts to identify ways in which students are demonstrating CCR, with a distinct focus on career-connected learning options.	Mar 2025
Using the landscape analysis, identify urban, suburban, and rural districts and schools across the state that are providing rigorous and engaging career-connected learning options for students. These districts will serve as exemplars or “bright spots” for work in Years 2–4.	Apr 2025
Recruit and facilitate an advisory panel of superintendents, principals, school counselors, career and technical education directors, early adopter teachers, and students from the exemplar districts to make recommendations for updating and expanding the Graduation Guidelines Menu of Options.	June 2025
Finalize recommendations to CDE for the updated Graduation Guidelines Menu of Options.	Sept 2025



**Planned Services for Years 2–5.** R8CC services in Years 2–5, as shown in Table 6, will build on those provided in Year 1. Planning for each year will begin in the final quarter of the preceding year and be informed by ongoing needs sensing, reflections on progress, and readiness for the next phase(s) of the project. Timeframes and milestones for Years 2–5 will be further specified when annual service plans are developed in collaboration with clients, partners, recipients, and other interested groups to reflect any changes in needs.

**Table 6. Years 2–5 Milestones for Expanding Graduation Options to Elevate Career and Postsecondary Success**

<b>Years 2–5 Milestones</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
Review data and reflect on progress and readiness for the next phases of work; review and update the project logic model, as needed; submit draft and final annual service plans according to guidance provided by ED.	Oct 2025–Sept 2029
In Year 2, the R8CC will (1) conduct a series of webinars on the updated Graduation Guidelines Menu of Options, sharing and promoting implementation examples and recommendations for Colorado education stakeholders; (2) identify and recruit a cohort of 3–4 schools or districts (Cohort 1) in rural communities with the highest rates of chronic absenteeism for improvement support; (3) engage Cohort 1 in conducting a needs assessment within their community to identify what resources are available, where the greatest needs exist, and potential barriers to implementation of pathways aligned to the Graduation Guidelines Menu of Options; and (4) support small teams of 3–4 members from each district or school to participate in a “seeing is believing” tour of bright spot districts identified in Year 1 and develop a plan for improving and increasing the number and types of pathways available to students in their own communities.	Oct 2025–Sept 2026
In Year 3, the R8CC will (1) support Cohort 1 to implement their plans to increase the number and types of pathways available to students, capturing the challenges and successes they experience, and the iterative improvements they make on their journeys; and (2) identify a second cohort of schools (Cohort 2) with the highest rates of chronic absenteeism among student groups with the greatest needs and begin supporting the pathway development and improvement process followed by Cohort 1.	Oct 2026–Sept 2027
In Year 4, the R8CC will (1) continue implementation and continuous improvement support for Cohort 1, using their experiences and lessons learned to support Cohort 2; and (2) establish a learning community among members of both cohorts to share ideas and experiences and support plans for scaling a Colorado-grown approach to scaling pathways development to other rural schools and districts.	Oct 2027–Sept 2028
In Year 5, the R8CC team will focus on ensuring sustainability of pathways development for all schools; developing, providing, and broadly disseminating implementation guidance, process tools, and success stories to help other schools and districts expand options for students that keep them connected to school and on a path to postsecondary workforce readiness.	Oct 2028–Sept 2029



**Table 7. 5-Year Service Plan:<sup>3</sup> Expanding Graduation Options to Elevate Career and Postsecondary Success**

Year(s)	Inputs	Capacity-Building Processes	Capacities Built	Outputs	Outcomes
1	HLP team, CDE, and experts (AIR, SWCEC leadership) CO school/district staff working on student engagement/graduation initiatives	Develop a needs assessment Develop a logic model Identify EBPPs Plan for implementation of EBPPs	Human capacity Organizational capacity Policy capacity	Needs assessment HLP project logic model Landscape analysis Literature review Recommended updates to the Menu of Options	<u>Short-term:</u> Increased understanding of ways in which CO students demonstrate CCR  Clarify and expand the CO Graduation Guidelines Menu of Options
2–5	HLP team, CDE, and experts (AIR, SWCEC leadership) CO school/district staff working on student engagement/graduation initiatives	Review/refine the HLP project logic model Plan for implementation of EBPPs Implement EBPPs Evaluate implementation of EBPPs	Human capacity Organizational capacity Resource capacity Policy capacity	Updated logic model Needs assessments for cohort districts Training and informational session materials for updated Menu of Options Site visit materials PL materials for cohort districts Implementation and sustainability plans Success stories	<u>Mid-term:</u> Increased LEA capacity to design, plan, implement, evaluate, and improve CCR options/pathways for students  Increased LEA capacity to develop systems and structures that support the implementation of CCR options/pathways for students  <u>Long-term:</u> Improved engagement for all students (as measured by a decrease in dropout rates), especially for groups of students with the greatest need  Increased on-time graduation rates for all students and all student groups

<sup>3</sup> For each of the 5-year service plans, processes, outputs, and outcomes may be repeated in project years, as part of the continuous improvement cycle and as activities expand to include new sites and new recipients, or staff transitions lead to changes in clients and recipients of capacity-building services.





## ***Kansas' HLP: Kansas Executive Leadership Development System (KELDS)***

### ***– Improving Educational Opportunities and Outcomes in Kansas Schools***

#### ***Through Leadership Development (A-PR2 & R-AR1)***

The Kansas State Board of Education's (KSBE's) vision is to "Lead the World in the Success of Each Student" (2016). To achieve this vision, Kansas needs strong superintendents with competencies required to lead long-term systemic change and improve student outcomes. Through the *KELDS* project, Kansas' HLP team will strengthen the state's capacity to develop district leaders who can transform education systems, improve academic achievement, and meet KSBE's goal to improve high school graduation rates.

#### **Capacity-Building Services**

- ESSA Connections: Title I, Part A (closing the achievement gap, and improving the quality of instruction for all students)
- RAC Central Priority: Meeting the Demand for Educators
- Raise the Bar: Achieve Academic Excellence, and Boldly Improve Learning Conditions

**HLP.** Since the 2016–17 school year, Kansas, like many other states, continues to experience high levels of superintendent turnover (Gibson, 2016; White, 2022). Over the past 10 years, 223 of 286 districts have experienced at least one change in superintendent leadership, with some experiencing up to four or five (B. Jordan, personal communication, May 15, 2024). The average tenure of a Kansas superintendent is 3.9 years, but in districts that have experienced more than one change, the average tenure is 1.2 years (B. Jordan, personal communication, May 15, 2024). This is a trend that must be addressed as studies have shown that superintendents' tenure can influence the cultivation of strong instructional leaders for schools, support the setting of non-negotiable goals, and impact student achievement (Hart et al., 2019; Myers, 2011; Parker-Chenaille, 2012). For example, the length of tenure in a single district has been found to be related to student achievement, with students in rural districts demonstrating significant growth



in achievement scores when their superintendents stay more than 5 years (Simpson, 2016). Given the relationship between length of superintendent tenure and student achievement, reducing superintendent turnover in Kansas schools, particularly in rural systems, is a HLP.

**Client Need.** Concerns about accountability requirements, the mental health and well-being of students and staff, and political polarization in their districts are among the reasons superintendents may leave their posts (Schwartz & Diliberti, 2022). Recommendations to assist superintendents in “surviving and prospering” as executive leaders, and stemming constant turnover, include ongoing PL and support to address the politics and stressors of the position (Chapman, 1997; Myers, 2011). The constant turnover and change in executive leaders in Kansas, coupled with additional sociopolitical challenges that have emerged in recent years and were voiced by superintendents participating in a series of executive leadership forums begun during the pandemic (R12CC, 2023) led Commissioner Randy Watson to identify **a new statewide approach to PL to support the growth and development of superintendents** as a priority for the R8CC to support.

**Superintendent Development.** KELDS is a collaborative partnership between the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE), Kansas Association of School Boards (KASB), Kansas Educational Leadership Institute at Kansas State University (KELI), and the United School Administrators of Kansas (USA-KS), with support from the current R12CC. In 2023–24, following a thorough review of research and discussion of the types of leadership Kansas students need to succeed, the partnership identified six domains of leadership and corresponding competencies—(1) Instructional, (2) Change, (3) Visionary, (4) Inclusive, (5) Interpersonal, and (6) Managerial—to accelerate Kansas superintendents in learning and mastering competencies that lead to systemic improvements in instruction and increased achievement of student

outcomes related to increased graduation rates. KELDS will support a superintendent through four career stages: Aspiring (up to 2 years preservice), Emerging (first 2 years), Developing (3–5 years), and Expanding (more than 5 years).

**Capacity-Building Services.** This project builds on the current partnership’s work to accelerate leadership competency development and close achievements gaps in Kansas schools. The partnership is currently finalizing learning modules for Instructional Leadership, which will be piloted in Year 1 of the new CC grant cycle as a “proof-of-concept” and studied to inform scaling across domains and career levels. TA and capacity building will inform the development of a research-based KELDS, including identification of policy-mechanisms for sustainability, which will be utilized statewide by education associations, ESAs, and IHEs to systematically prepare executive leaders for Kansas’ schools.

R8CC services will build upon each year’s accomplishments with improvements informed by PDSA cycles. After the pilot implementation and evaluation of Instructional Leadership, partners will take responsibility for implementation of KELDS with R8CC support for continuous improvement, evaluation, and scaling. The HLP team also will develop a marketing and recruitment plan to recruit recipients and disseminate information and a sustainability plan outlining partners’ roles and responsibilities to maintain and continuously improve KELDS.

**Expected Outcomes.** Short-term outcomes for this 5-year project include (1) developed materials, resources, and guidance for high-quality PL (KELDS modules; *resource capacity*), (2) increased knowledge and understanding of KELDS facilitators to deliver the modules with fidelity (*human capacity*), and (3) increased superintendent understanding of leadership domains and competencies (*human capacity*). Mid-term outcomes include increased the capacity of (1) facilitators to implement KELDS PL with fidelity (*human capacity*), (2) superintendents to

lead and support continuous school improvement processes within their districts (*human capacity*) and (3) KSDE and its partners to plan for KELDS sustainability and continuous improvement (*organizational and policy capacities*). Long-term outcomes are anticipated to include increased district retention of Kansas superintendents and, as a result of their participation in PL, improved student performance to achieve KSBE's goal to increase high school graduation rates to 95% (2023 baseline data of 88.1%; KSDE, 2023).

**Project Leadership and Expertise.** Drs. Doug Moeckel and Katie Allen, both based in Kansas and currently lead the R12CC's capacity-building services in the state, will continue to serve as co-leads for this project. Dr. Moeckel brings extensive experience working with education leaders across Kansas and will lead efforts in partner communications and engagement. He also will facilitate the pilot cohort of new superintendents through the KELDS Instructional Leadership module. Dr. Allen will lead the design of facilitated workshops to co-create KELDS materials and support evaluation of the implementation of KELDS PL. The co-leads will work together with key partners to develop plans for scaling and sustaining KELDS.

Key partners for this work are a Design Team of Kansas superintendents and education leaders who will support the development and delivery of KELDS PL, and marketing and recruitment efforts (see Appendix E, Letters of Support). The Design Team includes: Dr. Randy Watson, KSDE Commissioner, and Dr. Ben Proctor, Deputy Commissioner; Dr. Brian Jordan, Executive Director of KASB, and G. A. Buie, Executive Director of USA-KS, who bring connections to school leaders across the state and strong networking systems to support peer learning; Dr. Mischel Miller, Director of KELI, who leads an established mentoring program for superintendents in the first 2 years on-the-job (KELI will also integrate the Aspiring-level modules into their mentoring program); and superintendents leading urban, suburban, and rural



Kansas districts, who bring a wealth of knowledge and relevant experience leading education during the pandemic and implementing change to improve student outcomes.

**Planned Services for Year 1.** Table 8 describes the planned milestones and timelines the Kansas HLP team will complete in Year 1. Additional needs sensing to inform any changes or updates to the service plan will be completed within 90 days of the R8CC. Project co-leads will also connect with the Center on Strengthening and Supporting the Educator Workforce to identify potential supports, EBPPIs, and/or other relevant resources that could boost the success of KELDS.

During the first 2 project years, the HLP team will develop KELDS content aligned to research on identified leadership competencies. Simultaneously, a pilot cohort of superintendents (estimated 25–40 recipients) will engage in a module of Instructional Leadership (developed at the close of the FY19 CC Program cycle) and an implementation study will inform scaling KELDS across leadership domains, stages of a leader’s career, and throughout the state.

**Table 8. Year 1 Milestones for Developing and Implementing KELDS**

Year 1 Milestones	Timeframe
Review relevant data and set a shared intention for the work, create a logic model for the project, finalize the annual service plan, and establish a communications plan.	Oct–Dec 2024
Identify needs related to the management and implementation of KELDS.	Oct–Dec 2024
Identify/recruit an Instructional Leadership pilot cohort (25–40 recipients) and develop an implementation plan and timeline for the pilot.	Nov–Dec 2024
Develop an implementation plan, evaluation plan, and timelines for implementation of KELDS.	Nov–Dec 2024
Facilitate workshops for clients and partners to identify, outline, and draft content and learning experiences, grounded in research, for the five remaining domains of leadership.	Jan–Jun 2025
Implement and evaluate a pilot cohort of Emerging superintendents participating in PL on the Instructional Leadership domain and competencies (to inform scaling of the PL).	Jan–Sept 2025
Identify policy levers for sustainability and create an action plan for change.	Jan–Sept 2026

**Planned Services for Years 2–5.** R8CC services in Years 2–5, as shown in Table 9, will build on those provided in Year 1. Planning for each year, will begin in the final quarter of the preceding year, informed by ongoing needs sensing, reflections on progress, and readiness for the next phase(s) of the project. Timeframes and milestones for Years 2–5 will be further



specified when the annual service plans are developed in collaboration with clients, partners, recipients, and other interested groups to reflect any changes in needs.

**Table 9. Years 2–5 Milestones for Kansas Executive Leadership Development System (KELDS)**

Years 2–5 Milestones	Timeframe
Review data, reflect on progress and readiness for the next phases of work; review and update the project logic model, as needed; submit draft and final annual service plans according to guidance provided by ED.	Oct 2025–Sept 2029
Assess the readiness of partners to implement and scale KELDS.	Jun 2025
Develop a marketing and recruitment campaign for KELDS.	Mar 2025
Identify policy levers and create a KELDS management plan for statewide fidelity of implementation, scaling, and sustainability.	Oct–Dec 2025
Evaluate implementation of each module of the complete KELDS: (1) Instructional, (2) Change, (3) Visionary, (4) Inclusive, (5) Interpersonal, and (6) Managerial.	Oct 2026–May 2029
Use iterative (i.e., PDSA) improvements of each module.	Oct 2026–2029
Support policy change by developing a system for credentialing superintendents.	Oct 2027–May 2028
Develop a certification process for KELDS facilitators.	Oct 2028–May 2029
Finalize full KELDS and implement sustainability plans.	May 2029–Sept 2029

**Table 10. 5-Year Service Plan: KELDS**

Year(s)	Inputs	Capacity-Building Processes	Capacities Built	Outputs	Outcomes
1	HLP clients, partners, and experts from KSDE, KASB, KSU College of Education, KELI, USA-KS  District superintendents from urban, suburban, and rural KS schools  Kansas ESAs  Center on Strengthening and Supporting the Educator Workforce	Develop a needs assessment  Develop a logic model  Identify EBPPIs for implementation  Plan for implementation of EBPPIs	Human capacity  Organizational capacity	Needs identified  Logic model developed  Readiness identified  Evaluation plan developed  Instructional Leadership pilot cohort  Instructional Leadership pilot evaluation	<u>Short-term:</u> Developed materials, resources, and guidance for high-quality PL (KELDS modules)  Increased KELDS facilitators' knowledge and understanding of how to deliver the modules with fidelity  Increased superintendent understanding of leadership domains and competencies
2–5	HLP clients, partners, and experts from KSDE, KASB, KSU College of Education, KELI, USA-KS  District superintendents from urban, suburban, and rural KS schools  Kansas ESAs	Review/refine the HLP project logic model  Implement EBPPIs  Monitor and evaluate the EBPPIs	Human capacity  Organizational capacity  Policy capacity	Curriculum for five leadership domains, facilitator guides, and mentor guides across four career levels  Recruitment and marketing materials  KELDS management plan	<u>Mid-term:</u> Increased capacity of facilitators to implement KELDS PL with fidelity  Increased capacity of superintendents to lead and support continuous school improvement processes within their districts



Year(s)	Inputs	Capacity-Building Processes	Capacities Built	Outputs	Outcomes
	Center on Strengthening and Supporting the Educator Workforce			Plans for scaling across the six domains and four career levels Plans for sustainability Superintendent credentialing system Facilitator certification process Evaluation reports	Increased capacity among KSDE and its partners to plan for KELDS sustainability and continuous improvement <u>Long-term:</u> Increased district retention of Kansas superintendents Improved student performance to achieve KSBE's goal to increase high school graduation rates to 95%



### Missouri's HLP: Improving Early Literacy Instruction Through Formative

#### Assessment (A-PR2 & R-AR1)

Through the *Improving Early Literacy Instruction Through Formative Assessment* project, Missouri's HLP team will assist the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), LEAs, schools, and their local/regional partners to increase K–3 teachers' use of formative assessments in reading

to strengthen instructional practices that improve early literacy outcomes for all K–3 students, particularly for students from communities with the highest needs (e.g., in rural areas).

**HLP.** Foundational literacy includes skills (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) that are crucial to building the fundamental skills of reading, writing, and expression that establish a strong basis for lifelong success (Alyahyan & Düştegör, 2020; Denton et al., 2022; Lepola et al., 2016; Reschly, 2010). Missouri student performance in reading has been in decline (NCES, 2022c). In 2019, prior to the pandemic, 34% of Missouri's Grade 4 students were considered proficient or advanced on the NAEP Reading Assessment; that

#### Capacity-Building Services

- ESSA Connections: Title I, Part A, Title II, Part A (closing the achievement gap for disadvantaged and low-income students, effective teachers, and using innovation to support student learning)
- RAC Central Priority: Student Achievement and Growth
- Raise the Bar: Achieve Academic Excellence

number fell to 30% in 2022, with scores below the national average (NCES, 2022c). Grade 4 students who are Black or received FRPMs had an average score that was 34 and 30 points lower, respectively, than their White peers (NCES, 2022c). Similarly, results for Missouri's Assessment Program Reading scores have also declined over the past few years (from 45.3% of all students as proficient in 2019 to 43.6% in 2022), and almost a third of Grade 3 students (28.9%) are below basic proficiency (DESE, 2022). Clearly, increasing the reading proficiency of all students, particularly those with the greatest needs, is a HLP in Missouri.

**Client Need.** Recent Missouri legislation (e.g., S.B. 681, 2022) has placed a new emphasis on improving student literacy through various mandates for reading instruction, with a focus on early learning and foundational literacy skills. DESE's *Show Me Success Plan* prioritizes early learning and early literacy as key to equipping students with lifelong access to opportunity (n.d.b.). The state's current comprehensive literacy plan, *Read, Lead, Exceed Initiative*, provides literacy coaches through the RPDCs and materials for schools that support the science of reading (DESE, 2024).

With support from the R12CC, DESE has developed a statewide, early literacy formative assessment system that is free and accessible to all teachers in Missouri. The R12CC assisted DESE in assessing needs related to early literacy and formative assessment, engaging stakeholders in the creation of a formative assessment system, and beginning to build out the assessment item bank aligned to Missouri's Grade 2 Priority Standards. This system, named the Formative Assessment Builder (FAB), will be officially launched to teachers during Missouri's Annual Literacy Summit in July 2024. DESE incoming Commissioner Karla Eslinger has expressed a **core need to ensure coherence among policies and programs that support early**

**childhood and early literacy in Missouri** and views formative assessment as a key evidence-based practice (personal communication, May 29, 2024).

**Educators’ Use of Formative Assessment for Student Learning and Literacy.** Formative assessment is a classroom practice that teachers use to get a sense of students’ current mastery of content and skills to modify current and future instruction, provide learning opportunities for areas of growth, or plan opportunities to meet learning objectives (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Dixson & Worrell, 2016). Formative assessment allows students to learn through participation in an assessment activity and build on feedback from past attempts to try different strategies or with greater effort when making a new attempt at a learning opportunity, supporting the development of self-regulated learning (Cauley & McMillan, 2010; Clark, 2012; Husman et al., 2005; Miller & Lavin, 2007; Stiggins, 2005). Use of both formal (e.g., repeated low-stakes, criterion-based, and normed tests) and informal (e.g., “exit tickets,” reflective questioning, peer feedback) formative assessment strategies can lead to growth in foundational literacy skills (Dunphy, 2010; Gustafson et al., 2019; Kaminski et al., 2008; MacDonald, 2007). PL for teachers to use formative assessment practices and tools for literacy can also lead to improved student outcomes on both the formative assessment tool and subsequent writing tasks (Husman et al., 2005; Witmer et al., 2014). Despite the supporting evidence (Alonzo et al., 2023; Barana & Marchisio Conte, 2023; Pryor, 2010), many teachers are not familiar with how to most effectively use formative assessment to support student learning (Ahmedi, 2019; Van Orman et al., 2024).

**Capacity-Building Services.** The R8CC will support DESE to improve outcomes for all students and build the capacity of Missouri teachers in their use of formative assessment to improve early literacy instruction. To accomplish this, the R8CC proposes to provide TA to (1) identify policy structures that support early childhood and early literacy, (2) implement and

scale the FAB with a focus on usability, and (3) increase the number of teachers using formative assessment to improve early literacy outcomes through peer learning communities (PLCs) and other PL opportunities. TA and continuous support will include using PDSA cycles to support implementation and impact, and potential collaboration with groups including the Missouri Literacy Association (MLA) and teachers' unions to provide information, resources, and support for teachers to use FAB.

Over the course of this 5-year project, the R8CC will engage DESE and literacy experts housed in Missouri's RPDCs to develop a plan and timeline to continue populating the FAB with standards-aligned literacy items, as well as to scale the FAB to incorporate other grade-level priority standards and developed content. The R8CC will also work with early literacy partners in Missouri to identify their needs and connect them with teachers for customized PL to support their use of formative assessment with early literacy. Concurrently, the R8CC will conduct a literature review and develop resources and a resource package for teachers related to EBPPs for integrating formative assessment into practice (including practice guides available from the Institute of Education Sciences [IES] like *Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade* [Foorman et al., 2016]), as well as materials for school leaders on how they can support teachers using formative assessment methods for early literacy.

**Expected Outcomes.** Short-term outcomes for this 5-year project include (1) increasing teachers' understanding of how to use formative assessment as an instructional tool (*human capacity*), (2) DESE staff gaining knowledge and skills to develop and implement locally led processes that maintain and sustain the FAB system (*human capacity*), and (3) identifying needs and gaps in resources (*resource capacity*). The R8CC also will conduct a Missouri educational



policy landscape analysis to (4) support incoming Commissioner Eslinger’s understanding of the structures within Missouri and DESE to inform coherence and alignment of systems that support early childhood literacy (*policy and organizational capacity*). Accomplishing this will lead to mid-term outcomes of (1) teachers using formative assessment to improve their instructional practice, (2) DESE staff implementing plans to coordinate with local literacy experts to continuously contribute to the FAB item bank, (3) materials and resources created, such as standards-aligned assessment items and training materials, for supporting teachers’ use of formative assessment practices, and (4) DESE identifying and addressing gaps in policy to support implementation and ongoing improvement. The long-term goal of this project is to improve student literacy proficiency rates in Missouri.

**Project Leadership and Expertise.** Drs. Dylan Kriescher and Christina Lemon will serve as co-leads for this HLP project. Dr. Kriescher has expertise in formative assessment and prior experience supporting TA and capacity building projects through the CC program. Dr. Lemon, who currently provides intensive capacity building services for two projects in Colorado, is a former K–12 teacher and instructional coach, providing leadership to build education practices that serve all students, especially in the areas of personalized, inquiry-based, and competency-based learning. Subject-matter and technical expertise, including advising the HLP team on SEA leadership transitions as DESE welcomes its new commissioner of education, will come from the AEM Corporation: Dr. Chris Nicastro, a former DESE Commissioner, and Dr. Kathy Thornburg, a former DESE Assistant Commissioner, both located in Missouri.

The HLP team will consult with a broad range of stakeholders, beginning with DESE and the state’s RPDCs, and will identify other potential partners to engage (e.g., the Center for Early School Success and the National Center for Improving Literacy [NCIL]) and connect with

teachers across the state. Knowing the role of teachers' unions in supporting teacher growth and professionalism, the R8CC team will reach out to the Missouri National Education Association (MNEA) and the Missouri State Teachers Union (MSTU) to identify opportunities for collaboration such as hosting PL for teachers. Statewide organizations, such as the MLA, will be invited to join this project as a dissemination partner focused on sharing information about this project and its goals to improve early literacy outcomes.

**Planned Services for Year 1.** Table 11 describes the planned milestones and timelines the Missouri HLP team will complete in Year 1. Additional needs sensing to inform any changes or updates to the service plan will be completed within 90 days of the R8CC award. The HLP co-leads will also contact the Center for Early School Success and NCIL to explore available supports, resources, and collaboration opportunities.

**Table 11. Year 1 Milestones for Improving Early Literacy Instruction Through Formative Assessment**

Year 1 Milestones	Timeframe
Review relevant data and set a shared intention for the work, create a logic model for the project, finalize the annual service plan, and establish a communications plan.	Oct–Dec 2024
Assess DESE and K–5 teacher needs related to formative assessment in literacy, including gathering feedback from FAB developers and users.	Jan–Mar 2025
Conduct a literature review to identify EBPPs related to integrating formative assessment into instructional practice.	Jan–Jul 2025
Conduct a policy landscape analysis to identify current structures that support alignment of early childhood and early literacy efforts in Missouri.	Apr–Jun 2025
Select EBPPs, assess readiness, and develop implementation and evaluation plans.	Jul–Sept 2025

**Planned Services for Years 2–5.** R8CC services in Years 2–5, as shown in Table 12, will build on those provided in Year 1. Planning for each year will begin in the final quarter of the preceding year, informed by ongoing needs sensing, reflections on progress, and readiness for the next phase(s) of the project. Timeframes, outputs, and milestones for Years 2–5 will be further specified when annual service plans are developed in collaboration with clients, partners, recipients, and other interested groups to reflect any changes in needs.



**Table 12. Years 2–5 Milestones for Improving Early Literacy Instruction in Missouri Through Formative Assessment**

Years 2–5 Milestones	Timeframe
Review data, reflect on progress and readiness for the next phases of work; review and update the project logic model, as needed; submit draft and final annual service plans according to guidance provided by ED.	Oct 2025–Sept 2029
Develop and deliver PL on EBPPs related to integrating formative assessment into instructional practice for K–3 teachers and leaders in alignment with the release of FAB items for each grade (e.g., synchronous online workshops, in-person events, asynchronous online modules, PLCs).	Oct 2025–Sept 2028
Address policy and organizational gaps to bring coherence to early childhood and early literacy efforts in Missouri.	Oct 2026–Sept 2027
Evaluate the utilization and effectiveness of FAB and the implementation of EBPPs in K–3.	Oct 2027–Sept 2028
Scale the FAB with additional items for Grades K–3 aligned to the Missouri English Language Arts (ELA) Content Standards.	Oct 2028–Sept 2029
Utilize iterative PDSA cycles to continuously improve project implementation and impacts.	Oct 2024–Sept 2029

**Table 13. 5-Year Service Plan: Improving Early Literacy Instruction in Missouri Through Formative Assessment**

Year(s)	Inputs	Capacity-Building Processes	Capacities Built	Outputs	Outcomes
1	HLP partners and experts to include representatives from AEM RPDCs Center for Early School Success NCIL	Develop a needs assessment Develop a logic model Identify EBPPs Plan for implementation of EBPPs	Human capacity Organizational capacity Policy capacity Resource capacity	Needs identified Logic model Evaluation plan FAB formative feedback report Literature review on integrating formative assessment methods for instructional practice Policy landscape analysis EBPPs selected	<u>Short-term:</u> Increased teacher understanding of how to use formative assessment as an early literacy instructional tool DESE staff have the knowledge and skills to develop and implement locally led processes that maintain and sustain the FAB system Resource needs and gaps are identified Policy needs and gaps are identified to inform coherence and alignment of systems that support early childhood literacy
2–5	HLP partners and experts to include representatives from AEM RPDCs Center for Early School Success NCIL MLA MNEA MSTU	Review/refine the HLP project logic model Implement EBPPs Monitor and evaluate the EBPPs	Human capacity Organizational capacity Policy capacity Resource capacity	PL, materials, and resources (e.g., resource guides related to the implementation of EBPPs) Online resource package (literature review, links to IES practice guides, link to FAB, etc.)	<u>Mid-term:</u> Teachers utilize formative assessment to improve their instructional practice DESE staff implementing plans to coordinate with local literacy experts to continuously contribute to the FAB item bank DESE identifies and addresses gaps in policy to support implementation



Year(s)	Inputs	Capacity-Building Processes	Capacities Built	Outputs	Outcomes
				Informational campaign to support the adoption of FAB and EBPPs Evaluation reports	Materials and resources are created to support teachers' use of formative assessment practices <u>Long-term:</u> Improved student literacy proficiency for MO students



**Nebraska's HLP: Increasing Early Childhood Literacy (K–3) Through High-Quality, Evidence-Based Instructional Practices for All Learners (A-PR2 & R-AR1)**

Through the *Increasing Early Childhood Literacy Through High-Quality, Evidence-Based Instructional Practices for All Learners* project, Nebraska's HLP team will assist the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), LEAs, schools, and their partners to provide high-quality

Tier 1 practices in their K–3 classrooms that improve early literacy outcomes and proficiency as measured by standardized assessments, particularly for students from communities with the highest needs (e.g., in rural areas).

**HLP.** Reading at grade level by the end of Grade 3 is crucial to children's educational development, yet more than 1 in 3 third graders in Nebraska do not meet proficiency standards in English language arts (ELA) on the Nebraska Student-Centered Assessment System (NDE, 2023a). When compared to reading proficiency rates for their White peers (67% proficient), Black (33% proficient), Hispanic (40% proficient), and students with the highest needs, such as those eligible for FRPMs (43% proficient), perform much more poorly (NDE, 2023a). Improving early literacy outcomes and reading proficiency for all students, particularly students with the highest needs, is a HLP in Nebraska.

**Capacity-Building Services**

- ESSA connections: Title I, Part A (closing the achievement gap) and Title IV (activities to support well-rounded educational opportunities)
- RAC Central Priority: Student Achievement and Growth
- Raise the Bar: Achieve Academic Excellence



**Client Need.** In 2018, the Nebraska legislature passed the Nebraska Reading Improvement Act, which requires schools to administer literacy assessments in Grades K–3 and provide reading interventions to children who are identified as needing additional support based on the results of these assessments and as specified through individualized reading improvement plans developed to support them. More recently (2023), state lawmakers approved L.B. 298, which requires districts to report the number of students taking literacy assessments, as well as the number of students identified as having a reading deficiency. These laws spurred a wide array of activities throughout the state, led by NDE’s NebraskaREADS initiative, which provides tools and resources to schools to support the implementation of the Reading Improvement Act’s requirements.

As foundational literacy (PreK–3) is critical to academic success and school completion (Alyahyan & Düşteğör, 2020; Denton et al., 2022; Lepola et al., 2016; Reschly, 2010), the NDE is renewing its focus on early literacy, with a goal to increase Grades 3–8 proficiency on the state assessment from the 2023 level of 58% (NDE, 2023b). Proficiency in foundational literacy allows students to move from “learning to read” to “reading to learn,” making the focus on K–3 reading the critical lever in future academic success. Dr. Maher, Nebraska’s Commissioner of Education, affirmed K–3 literacy as a priority for the state, noting that the State Board had established a goal that, by 2030, 75% of students would demonstrate proficiency in reading by the end of Grade 3 (personal communication, March 28, 2024). One strategy to achieve this goal is building teacher capacity to deliver high-quality Tier 1 instruction. Teachers’ capacity to deliver **high-quality Tier 1 instruction is important for all students and critical for underserved student populations, including multilingual learners** (Hubbell et al., 2024a-d).

**Capacity-Building Services.** To help Nebraska schools improve early reading outcomes for all students and achieve the State Board’s 2030 goal that 75% of students will be proficient readers by the end of Grade 3, the R8CC will support the NDE to (1) understand the early literacy landscape across the state, including implementation of Tier 1 EBPPs in early literacy instruction; (2) design, implement, and pilot teacher PL on Tier 1 EBPPs in early literacy with a group of teacher leaders; and (3) scale-up use of the Tier 1 EBPPs for early literacy among K–3 teachers statewide. Coherence among Nebraska partners, including ESUs, IHEs, and the Nebraska Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (NeMTSS) regional support teams will be an important component of the logic model that will guide the proposed work.

**Expected Outcomes.** Short-term outcomes for this 5-year project include (1) increased understanding the early literacy landscape across the state (*human capacity*), (2) increased knowledge of evidence-based Tier 1 early literacy instruction and systems and processes to support implementation (*human and organizational capacities*), and (3) increased knowledge of evidence-based Tier 1 early literacy instruction among a group of pilot teacher leaders (*human capacity*). Mid-term outcomes include (1) increased capacity among pilot schools to deliver high-quality PL (*human and organizational capacity*), (2) increased capacity among the pilot teachers to provide high-quality Tier 1 practices in their classrooms (*human capacity*), and (3) increased capacity of the NDE for statewide scale-up of EBPPs in K–3 early literacy. Finally, the long-term outcome is improved early literacy proficiency as measured on a standardized K–2 reading assessment and Nebraska’s 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading assessment within the Nebraska Student-Centered Assessment System (NSCAS).

**Project Leadership and Expertise.** Dr. Jeanette King, who has recent experience supporting the NDE and its partners with high-quality capacity-building services through the R11CC, and

Dr. Richard Resendez, a proposed R8CC co-director, will lead this HLP project. Additional support from subject-matter and technical experts from Mathematica will include Susan Vermeer Lopez, who has experience working with Nebraska as a CC liaison; Dr. Larisa Campuzano, who has experience in literacy and research; Dr. Walter Herring, who has experience in foundational literacy research; and Olivia Lutwak, who has expertise in foundational literacy TA. The team will reach out to the Center for Early School Success and NCIL to explore sharing of resources or opportunities to collaborate as the state plan is finalized during the first 90 days.

**Planned Services for Year 1:** Table 14 describes the planned milestones and timelines the Nebraska HLP team will complete in Year 1. Additional needs sensing to inform any changes or updates to the service plan will be completed within 90 days of the R8CC award. Completion of Year 1 milestones and outputs will form the foundation of our implementation approach in subsequent years and provide a framework for high-quality PL for teachers.

**Table 14. Year 1 Milestones for Increasing Early Childhood Literacy (K–3) Through High-Quality, Evidence-Based Instructional Practices for All Learners**

Year 1 Milestones	Timeframe
Review data and set a shared intention for the work, create a logic model for Year 1 capacity-building services, finalize the annual service plan, and establish a communications plan.	Oct–Dec 2024
Complete a literature review and report on Tier 1 EBPPi instructional strategies in early literacy.	Dec 2024–Feb 2025
Conduct statewide listening sessions, site visits, and artifact reviews to describe early literacy efforts.	Dec 2024–Mar 2025
Recruit teacher leaders for the design and implementation of PL for Tier 1 EBPPi instructional strategies in early literacy.	Apr–May 2025
Convene teacher leaders for a series of work sessions to design and plan for implementation of PL for Tier 1 EBPPi instructional strategies in early literacy.	Jun–Sept 2025

**Planned Services for Years 2–5:** R8CC services in Years 2–5, shown in Table 15, will build on those provided in Year 1. Timelines, milestones, and outputs will be further specified when annual service plans are developed. At a minimum, the R8CC will collaborate with HLP partners, experts, and interested groups.



**Table 15. Year 2–5 Milestones for Increasing Early Childhood Literacy (K–3) Through High-Quality, Evidence-Based Instructional Practices for All Learners**

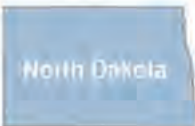
Years 2–5 Milestones	Timeframe
Review data, reflect on progress, and set a shared intention for the upcoming year's work; assess readiness and update the logic model for the year's capacity-building services; and finalize the annual service plan.	Oct 2025–2029
Plan for and implement a pilot of PL for Tier 1 EBPPs for early literacy to include preparing guidance materials, recruiting and training teachers, documenting feedback, and updating the Nebraska Open Education Research (OER) Hub, designed to curate and create quality open educational resources that are aligned to the Nebraska standards and curricula.	Oct 2025–Sept 2029
Scale-up use of the Tier 1 EBPPs for early literacy statewide to include training on the use of EBPPs and collecting feedback to ensure the resources and PL are accessible and valuable to end users.	Oct 2026–2029
Assess success of teacher learning on instructional pedagogy, and outcomes for K–3 students, including disadvantaged and multilingual learners.	Oct 2025–Sept 2029

**Table 16. 5-Year Service Plan: Increasing Early Childhood Literacy (K–3) Through High-Quality, Evidence-Based Instructional Practices for All Learners**

Year(s)	Inputs	Capacity-Building Processes	Capacities Built	Outputs	Outcomes
1	HLP team, partners, and experts to include representatives from the Nebraska K–3 ELA standards committee and ESUs Nebraska ELA standards Nebraska literacy specialists Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center (MAPEAC) NCIL Center for Early School Success	Develop a needs assessment Develop a logic model Identify EBPPs Plan for implementation of EBPPs	Human capacity Organizational capacity	Needs identified Logic model Literature review and report on Tier 1 EBPP instructional strategies in early literacy Recruitment plan for pilot schools/teacher leaders Plan for PL for EBPPs	<u>Short-term:</u> Increased understanding of the early literacy landscape across the state Increased knowledge of evidence-based Tier 1 early literacy instruction and systems and processes to support implementation Increased knowledge of evidence-based Tier 1 early literacy instruction among a group of pilot teacher leaders
2–5	HLP partners and experts to include representatives from the Nebraska K–3 ELA standards committee and ESUs Nebraska ELA standards Nebraska literacy specialists NCIL	Review/refine the HLP project logic model Implement EBPPs Monitor and evaluate the EBPPs	Human capacity Organizational capacity Resource capacity	Resources to identify EBPPs for Tier 1 K–3 early literacy instruction compiled for the pilot (e.g., guidance materials), fidelity assessed EBPPs monitored and evaluated in the pilot schools	<u>Mid-term:</u> Increased capacity among pilot schools to deliver high-quality PL Increased capacity among the pilot teachers to provide high-quality Tier 1 practices in classrooms Increased NDE capacity for statewide scale-up of EBPPs in K–3 early literacy



Year(s)	Inputs	Capacity-Building Processes	Capacities Built	Outputs	Outcomes
	Center for Early School Success MAPEAC			Plan for statewide scale-up of early literacy Tier 1 EBBPIs	<u>Long-term:</u> Improved early literacy proficiency as demonstrated as measured on standardized K–2 reading assessment and the NSCAS 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade reading assessment



### North Dakota's HLP: Improving Working Conditions to Retain Qualified

#### Teachers to Support Student Learning (A-PR2 & R-AR1)

Through the *Improving Working Conditions to Retain Qualified Teachers to Support Student Learning* project, North Dakota's HLP team will assist the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI) to implement Governor Doug Burgum's taskforce recommendations to build education leaders' capacity to improve teacher working conditions so that all students have equitable access to effective teachers.

#### Capacity-Building Services

- ESSA connections: Title II, Part A, Title IV, Part A (supporting effective instruction, teacher and principal quality, and academic achievement)
- RAC Central Priority: Staff Shortages, Staff Recruitment and Retention
- Raise the Bar: Boldly Improve Learning Conditions

**HLP.** North Dakota faces a significant shortage of teachers due to increasing teacher vacancies (Feir & Liu, 2024; NDDPI, 2024) and decreasing teacher retention (Crane, 2023). This problem is further exacerbated in small towns and rural schools—which account for more than 50% of the state's public schools (NCES, 2017)—due to additional complexities of attracting teachers to areas that are geographically isolated (Monk, 2007). Therefore, slowing the teacher attrition rate, especially in rural areas, could help address the current teacher shortage (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Darling-Hammond & Podolsky, 2019).

Teacher shortages in North Dakota are a persistent problem. In the 2022–23 school year, the NDDPI reported a 26% increase in teacher vacancies from the previous school year, totaling over 440 teacher vacancies (NDDPI, 2024). Moreover, one-third of North Dakota’s teachers leave the profession in their first 5 years (ND Governor’s Office, Executive Order [E.O.] 2023-08). To help address this problem, Governor Burgum signed an executive order approving emergency licensure for teachers, resulting in over 300 North Dakota teachers serving on emergency licenses (ND Governor’s Office, E.O. 2023-08). Concurrently, the North Dakota teachers’ union conducted a survey of teachers regarding educator retention that revealed widespread dissatisfaction among teachers, with nearly half considering leaving the teaching profession (DFM Research, 2023). Among teachers considering leaving the profession, the most common reason is teacher burnout and stress (DFM Research, 2023; see Figure 9). Of all the factors that affect student achievement, teachers matter most (Chetty et al., 2014; Oppen, 2019). Therefore, reducing teacher attrition and increasing the retention of high-quality teachers in schools and classrooms is a HLP in North Dakota.

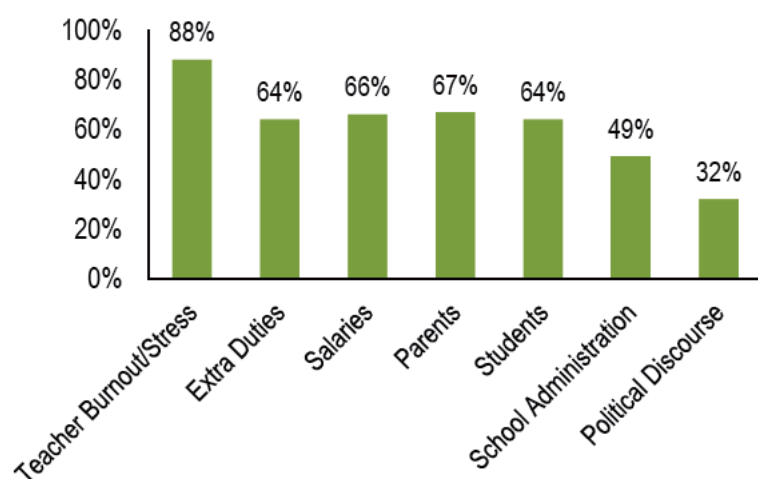


Figure 9. Reasons Teachers Are Considering Leaving the Profession

**Governor’s Taskforce for Teacher Recruitment and Retention.** To tackle this challenge, Governor Burgum established the Taskforce for Teacher Recruitment and Retention (ND Governor’s Office, E.O. 2023-08). Citing a host of teacher recruitment and retention challenges, the executive order identifies working conditions, including workload, access to PL

opportunities, and school leadership support as affecting whether teachers remain in the classroom. In September 2024, the taskforce will provide recommendations in a final report to the governor in several areas, including increasing recruitment for the teaching profession; improving teacher preparation programs, teacher licensure, teacher evaluation, working conditions, compensation, and contracts; and identifying barriers to entry into the teaching profession. Ultimately, recommendations from the taskforce may result in legislation being introduced during the 2025 legislative session.

**Client Needs.** Needs-sensing conversations with State Superintendent Kristen Baesler and key NDDPI leaders (personal communication, February 13, 2024), as well as ongoing needs assessments as part of the current R11CC’s school improvement work in North Dakota, confirmed reducing teacher attrition by **improving working conditions to attract and retain qualified teachers to support student learning** as a priority need for the state and the HLP focus for the R8CC.

**Teachers’ Working Conditions.** Though some degree of teacher attrition due to retirement or moving away from districts is to be expected, factors such as the working conditions teachers experience in schools are within a district’s control and may affect teachers’ decisions to stay or leave (Regional Educational Laboratory [REL] Northwest, 2023). Studies have identified several categories of working conditions that may influence whether teachers choose to leave their schools, including (1) leadership opportunities for teachers; (2) time for teaching and planning; (3) relevant PL, including opportunities to collaborate with peers; and (4) coherent, connected instructional initiatives and support (Allensworth et al., 2009; Barnett, 2024; Ulferts, 2016). Strategies that education leaders may develop to address these factors include involving teachers in decisions making, ensuring coherence among instructional initiatives, fostering teacher



collaboration around instructional practice, and working to build trust between teachers and administrators (REL Northwest, 2023). School and district leaders have a responsibility to attend to the working conditions in their schools. Teachers' views of their school leaders' effectiveness greatly influence their perceptions of working conditions and decisions to remain in their schools (Boyd et al., 2011).

**Capacity-Building Services.** To support North Dakota schools and districts in their efforts to increase teacher retention, the R8CC will assist the NDDPI and its partners to (1) analyze, prioritize, and act on recommendations from Governor Burgum's taskforce to build capacity among education leaders across the state to improve teachers' working conditions; (2) design and deliver PL opportunities, resources, and tools for education leaders to improve teachers' working conditions; and (3) implement cycles of continuous improvement with education leaders to improve working conditions for teachers. Through these collaborative efforts, the R8CC HLP team will enable the NDDPI and LEAs to substantially increase teacher retention by building the capacity of school and district leaders to identify, implement, and evaluate EBPPIs that improve the working conditions for teachers in schools.

**Expected Outcomes.** Short-term outcomes for this 5-year project include (1) understanding the taskforce recommendations concerning teachers' working conditions (*human capacity*), and (2) increased understanding of EBPPIs and organizational supports related to improving teachers' working conditions and retention (*human and organizational capacities*). Mid-term outcomes of the project include (1) improved education leaders' capacity to implement practices that support continued improvements to teachers' working conditions (*human and organizational capacities*); and (2) increased capacity of educational leaders to develop policy and practices designed to improve teachers' working conditions and thus retention (*human, policy, and*



*resource capacities*). Finally, the project's long-term outcomes include (1) increased teacher retention rates within the state, and (2) equitable access to effective teachers and high-quality instruction for all students.

**Project Leadership and Expertise.** Joe Simpson and Dr. Tara Issacs, distinguished leaders with extensive experience in public education and providing intensive capacity-building services, will be the HLP co-leads for this project. Other HLP team members, who bring a wealth of expertise and knowledge of the North Dakota context will include: Laurie Matzke, NDDPI Assistant Superintendent, who has a deep understanding of North Dakota statutory requirements, department rules and regulations, as well as a talent for identifying critical state partners essential for advancing the project's goals; Joe Kolosky, Director of the Office of School Approval and Opportunity at NDDPI and representative to the Governor's Taskforce for Teacher Recruitment and Retention, who will offer strategic guidance regarding education leaders' credentials and for developing capacity-building activities; and Anne Ellefson, Title II Administrator at NDDPI, who brings expertise in developing leaders regarding continuous school improvement cycles. Dr. Kent Davis, Consulting Director, will provide subject-matter expertise related to district and school leadership and strengthening leadership capacities. Additionally, representatives from educational leadership organizations, teachers' associations, and representatives from the University of North Dakota and North Dakota State University will be invited to participate as project partners.

In Year 1, as part of the services planned and anticipated for Years 2–5, the R8CC will commence its partnership with the NDDPI, state partners, educators, and university staff to conduct a literature review to identify educational leaders' essential knowledge and skills to improve teachers' working conditions. This literature review, in conjunction with the taskforce recommendations, will lay the foundation for tailoring our services to the specific needs of

North Dakota's educational landscape. This collaborative effort will inform the development of a Year 1 service plan, strategically designed to address North Dakota's identified needs and priorities. Furthermore, the findings from this literature review will serve as the basis for our ongoing engagement over the subsequent years, ensuring that our services remain responsive and effective in supporting the state's educational goals.

**Planned Services for Year 1.** Table 17 describes the planned milestones and timelines the North Dakota HLP team will complete in Year 1. Additional needs sensing to inform any changes or updates to the service plan will be completed within 90 days of the R8CC award.

**Table 17. Year 1 Milestones for Improving Working Conditions to Attract and Retain Qualified Teachers to Support Student Learning**

Year 1 Milestones	Timeframe
Review relevant data and set a shared intention for the work, create a project team charter and logic model for the project, finalize the annual service plan, and establish a communications plan.	Oct–Dec 2024
Analyze the Governor's Taskforce for Teacher Recruitment and Retention recommendations regarding improving teachers' working conditions.	Oct–Nov 2025
Complete a literature review to identify EBBPIs, tools, and resources related to improving teachers' working conditions and retention.	Feb 2025
Develop materials, resources, and tools designed to help education leaders implement strategies to improve teachers' working conditions and retention (e.g., a framework and tools to strengthen coherence across instructional initiatives, process and facilitation guides for teacher collaboration focused on instruction and student learning).	May–Aug 2025
Draft an implementation and evaluation plan for a group of education leaders to pilot strategies to improve working conditions in their schools or districts.	Sept 2025

**Planned Services for Years 2–5.** R8CC services in Years 2–5, as shown in Table 18, will build on those provided in Year 1. Planning for each year will begin in the final quarter of the preceding year, informed by ongoing needs sensing, reflections on progress, and readiness for the next phase(s) of the project. Timeframes and milestones for Years 2–5 will be further specified when the annual service plans are developed in collaboration with clients, partners, recipients, and other interested groups to reflect any changes in needs.



**Table 18. Years 2–5 Milestones for Improving Working Conditions to Attract and Retain Qualified Teachers to Support Student Learning**

Years 2–5 Milestones	Timeframe
Review data, reflect on progress and readiness for the next phases of the work; review and update the HLP project team charter and project logic model, as needed; and finalize the annual service plan.	Oct 2025–2029
In Year 2, the R8CC will (1) recruit a small group of education leaders interested in piloting strategies to improve working conditions in their schools or districts; (2) engage the leaders to assess needs and opportunities within their schools and districts to strengthen working conditions; (3) select 1–2 EBPPs to pilot, (4) identify any barriers or challenges to implementing the EBPPs, and (5) develop a plan to implement and evaluate the selected EBPPs.	Oct 2025–Sept 2026
In Year 3, the R8CC will (1) support the leaders piloting different EBPPs in their schools and districts to monitor implementation of their efforts, (2) implement continuous improvement cycles guided by monitoring results, (3) document lessons learned through implementation, and (4) develop a resource (e.g., bright-spots report) for other North Dakota schools and districts to learn how their peers are improving working conditions.	Oct 2026–Sept 2027
In Year 4, the R8CC will (1) recruit a second group of education leaders from schools and districts with the lowest retention rates in the state to join the pilot group, establishing a small, networked improvement community (NIC) <sup>4</sup> focused on improving teacher working conditions in their schools and districts; and (2) support the NIC to implement, learn from, and share with others across the state about their respective efforts to improve teachers' working conditions.	Oct 2027–Sept 2028
In Year 5, the R8CC will continue to support the NIC with a focus on ensuring its sustainability, including (1) helping the NIC grow and scale improvements to other North Dakota schools and districts; (2) exploring additional EBPPs to increase teacher retention; and (3) sharing stories of the impacts they have produced.	Oct 2028–Sept 2029

**Table 19. 5-Year Service Plan: Improving Working Conditions to Attract and Retain Qualified Teachers to Support Student Learning**

Year(s)	Inputs	Capacity-Building Processes	Capacities Built	Outputs	Outcomes
1	HLP team and experts ND teachers' association ND REAs Governor's taskforce recommendations	Develop a needs assessment Develop a logic model Identify EBPPs Plan for implementation of EBPPs	Human capacity Organizational capacities	Needs assessment Logic model Literature review Materials, resources, and tools to improve teachers' working conditions and retention Implementation and evaluation plan	<u>Short-term:</u> Understand the taskforce recommendations concerning teachers' working conditions Increased understanding of EBPPs and organizational supports related to improving teachers' working conditions and retention
2–5	HLP team and experts ND teachers' association	Review/refine the HLP project logic model Implement the EBPPs	Human capacity Organizational capacity	Pilot districts/schools needs assessments EBPPs aligned to identified needs	<u>Mid-term:</u> Improved education leaders' capacity to implement practices that support continued improvements to

<sup>4</sup> NICs are a high-quality approach to improvement efforts by providing participants with a structure for organizing people around a common challenge, scaling changes within an organization, and accelerating participant learning (Bryk et al., 2015).



Year(s)	Inputs	Capacity-Building Processes	Capacities Built	Outputs	Outcomes
	ND REAs University of North Dakota leadership North Dakota State University leadership	Evaluate implementation of the EBPPs	Resource capacity Policy capacity	Implementation and evaluation plans for pilot districts/schools Briefs, stories, or infographics documenting lessons learned, improvement journey, and impacts	teachers' working conditions Increased capacity of education leaders to develop policy and practices designed to improve teachers' working conditions and retention <u>Long-term:</u> Increased teacher retention rates across the state Equitable access to effective teachers and high-quality instruction for all students



**South Dakota's HLP #1: Increasing Math Achievement in Grades 4–8 Through High-Quality, Evidence-Based Instruction for All Learners (A-PR2 & R-AR1)**

The *Increasing Math Achievement in Grades 4–8 Through High-Quality, Evidenced-Based Instruction for All Learners* project will support LEAs, schools, and their local/regional partners in developing a mathematics instructional framework that guides teachers to use evidence-based math practices in Grades 4–8 so that all South Dakota students

demonstrate proficiency in math by the 2032–33 school year (South Dakota Administrative Rule 24:55:05:02). Additionally, the SDDOE indicated a desire to improve math test scores for students in Grades 4–8 to address disparities among subgroups and an overall decline in math achievement (J. Graves, personal communication, March 11, 2024).

**Capacity-Building Services**

- ESSA connections: Title II, Part A and Title IV, Part A (closing the achievement gap for disadvantaged and low-income students, effective teachers, and using innovation to support student learning)
- RAC Central Priority: Student Achievement and Growth
- Raise the Bar: Achieve Academic Excellence



**HLP.** Broadly, South Dakota NAEP scores reveal a slight decline in math achievement for students in Grades 4 and 8 from 2019 to 2022. The latest NAEP data show that South Dakota Grade 4 students' math scores declined from averages of 241 in 2019 to 239 in 2022 (NCES, 2022a) and Grade 8 students' math scores declined from average scores of 287 in 2019 to 281 in 2022, with the percentage of students scoring below basic increasing for both grade levels (NCES, 2022b). NAEP results also reveal disparities in math achievement between racial groups in Grades 4 and 8. For both grades, South Dakota's students in all ethnic minority groups scored lower than their White counterparts (Figure 10; NCES, 2022a, 2022b).

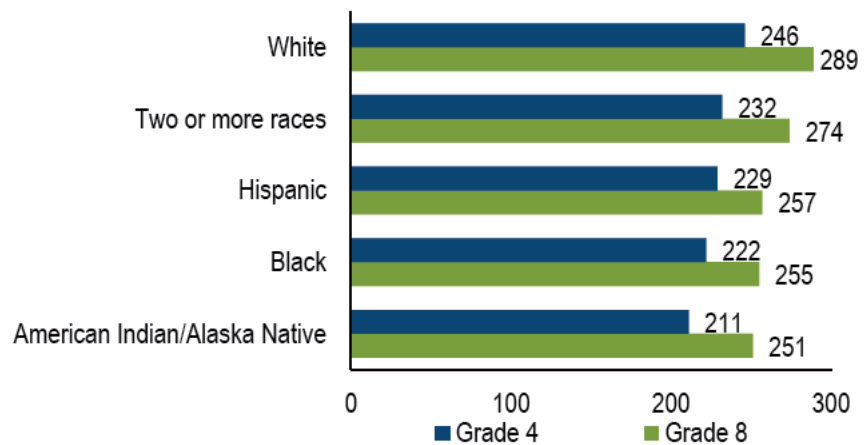


Figure 10. 2022 Grades 4 and 8 NAEP Math Scores by Race

To better address the overall decline and racial disparities in math achievement, the SDDOE is prioritizing the development of a math framework to build the capacity of teachers in Grades 4–8 to provide evidence-based instruction. South Dakota's 2022–23 state assessment results also reflect low math proficiency with 43% of tested students scoring proficient, and low proficiency among groups with high needs, including students receiving FRPMs (24% proficient), ELs (18% proficient), and American Indian/Alaska Native students (12% proficient) (SDDOE, 2024). These data confirm that student achievement in math is a HLP in South Dakota.

**Client Needs.** During needs-sensing meetings and follow-up conversations with McREL in March 2023, SDDOE Secretary of Education Dr. Joseph Graves expressed a desire to **improve math achievement and growth, with a focus on students in Grades 4–8, to address**

**persistent disparities among student groups and a gradual decline in math achievement for all students** (personal communication, March 11, 2024). Noting South Dakota’s success in improving literacy instruction through statewide capacity building in the science of reading, Secretary Graves expressed a need for a similar approach to improving mathematics instruction—a science of math—for South Dakota students.

**Evidence-Based Math Instruction and the Science of Math.** Research demonstrates that high-quality math instruction is key to improving student math performance (Robin et al., 2023). The use of EBPPs, such as those meeting WWC standards (see, for example, Fuchs et al., 2021 and Woodward et al., 2018), positively impact students’ math learning (Robin et al., 2023). Research supports that teachers’ capacity to provide high-quality math instruction is greatly influenced by teachers’ knowledge of the benefits of EBPPs, their understanding of how these approaches are effectively used in the classroom, their knowledge of what contextual circumstances would best fit each evidence-based approach, and what groups of students would respond to each approach (Hott et al., 2019; Peltier et al., 2020).

The science of math focuses on objective evidence about how students learn math by blending concepts, procedures, strategies, reasoning, and disposition to inform policy and practice (Coddling et al., 2023). With a goal to ensure all students have access to high-quality math instruction, the science of math offers tools and resources for schools and districts to strengthen math instruction, such as a rubric to evaluate math curricula for evidence-based math practices (Anderson, 2023).

**Capacity-Building Services.** In spring 2024, the SDDOE hired a math and science specialist to help districts and schools improve mathematics instruction and outcomes for students. Working with this specialist, the R8CC team will accomplish two goals:

1. Develop an instructional framework for math instruction in Grades 4–8 that is grounded in evidence-based math practices and incorporates science of math tools and resources.
2. Design and implement a statewide networked improvement community (NIC) to pilot, improve, and evaluate the new Grades 4–8 math instructional framework for South Dakota.

NICs are a high-quality approach to improvement efforts by providing recipients with a structure for scaling changes within an organization and accelerating participant learning (Bryk et al., 2015). They also serve as a structure for organizing people around a common challenge. NICs will be initiated to help teachers adopt and refine the newly acquired evidence-based math knowledge and instructional practices developed for the math framework. This will further enhance the impact of the framework and associated tools/resources.

**Expected Outcomes.** Short-term outcomes for the R8CC work addressing SDDOE’s HLP include (1) increased knowledge of evidence-based math instruction and instructional frameworks in Grades 4–8 (*human capacity*); (2) understanding the landscape of Grades 4–8 math instruction and frameworks in use across South Dakota (*human and organizational capacities*); (3) creation of an evidence-based South Dakota math instructional framework for Grades 4–8 (*organizational, policy, and resource capacity*); and (4) increased knowledge of NICs (e.g., purpose, operation, implementation considerations) (*human capacity*). Mid-term outcomes include (1) increased SEA and LEA capacity to implement and support continuous improvement of the new mathematical framework (*human and organizational capacities*); and (2) increased LEA and school capacity to implement high-quality math instruction in Grades 4–8 pilot teachers’ classrooms with PDSA cycles integrated to accelerate teacher learning (*human capacity*). Finally, the long-term outcome is that all South Dakota students demonstrate



proficiency in math by the 2032–33 school year (South Dakota Administrative Rule 24:55:05:02).

**Project Leadership and Expertise.** The South Dakota co-leads, Ms. Kathleen Dempsey and Dr. Avalloy McCarthy, each having extensive experience providing high-quality math instruction and leading intensive capacity-building services, will lead the HLP team in collaboration with SDDOE’s math and science specialist. Additional subject-matter and technical expertise will be provided by Dr. Doug Van Dine, an expert in K–16 math instruction, research, and leadership at Mathematica, and Dr. Billie Jo Day, a senior researcher at AIR and an expert in NICs and improvement science.

**Planned Services for Year 1.** Table 20 describes the planned milestones and timelines the South Dakota HLP team will complete in Year 1. Additional needs sensing to inform any changes or updates to the service plan will be completed within 90 days of the R8CC award.

**Table 20. Year 1 Milestones for Increasing Math Achievement in Grades 4–8 Through High-Quality, Evidence-Based Instruction for All Learners (PR 2, AR1)**

Year 1 Milestones	Timeframe
Review relevant data and set a shared intention for the work, create a logic model for the project, finalize the annual service plan, and establish a communications plan.	Oct–Dec 2024
Conduct a literature review to identify EBPPs in math for Grades 4–8, existing math instructional frameworks, and science of math tools and resources aligned to identified EBPPs and instructional frameworks. This review will inform the development of a framework to guide teacher learning for Grades 4–8 math teachers in subsequent years.	Nov 2024–Jan 2025
Conduct a gap analysis between South Dakota’s mathematics standards and EBPPs identified through the literature review.	Feb–Mar 2025
Draft a South Dakota math instructional framework that includes evidence-based teaching practices and connections to science of math tools and resources.	Mar–Apr 2025
Engage mathematics teachers, leaders, and other South Dakota education stakeholders to provide feedback on the draft South Dakota math framework.	Apr–Jun 2025
Refine the draft South Dakota math instructional framework based on stakeholder feedback.	Jun–Jul 2025
With the SDDOE’s math and science specialist, share the new framework with Secretary Graves and SDDOE leaders.	Aug 2025
Finalize a draft of the evidence-based math framework statewide and plan for implementation using a NIC approach.	Sept 2025

**Planned Services for Years 2–5.** R8CC services in Years 2–5, as shown in Table 21, will build on those provided in Year 1. Planning for each year will begin in the final quarter of the



preceding year, informed by ongoing needs sensing, reflections on progress, and readiness for the next phase(s) of the project. Timeframes and milestones for Years 2–5 will be further specified when annual service plans are developed in collaboration with clients, partners, recipients, and other interested groups to reflect any changes in needs.

**Table 21. Years 2–5 Milestones for Increasing Math Achievement in Grades 4–8 Through High-Quality, Evidence-Based Instruction for All Learners (PR 2, AR1)**

Years 2–5 Milestones	Timeframe
Review data, reflect on progress and readiness for the next phases of work; review and update the project logic model, as needed; and finalize the annual service plan.	Oct 2025–2029
In Year 2, the R8CC will (1) recruit NIC participants, collect feedback on the new math evidence-based framework, and monitor lessons being learned by the participants; (2) convene NIC participants for an introduction to the framework and initial training in improvement science and the PDSA approach; assess needs for future PL (e.g., science of math focus areas) and preferences for coaching supports; (3) conduct usability testing and revise the draft framework with SDDOE staff to determine alignment of the framework to the state's teacher effectiveness system, the South Dakota Teacher Standards; and (4) Disseminate the final evidence-based math framework statewide and support scale-up.	Oct 2025– Sept 2026
In Year 3, the R8CC will (1) conduct site visits at schools identified by the SDDOE to view elements of the framework operationalized in practice and revise the draft framework based on observations; (2) convene NIC participants and recruit new participants for an introduction to the framework and initial training in improvement science and the PDSA approach. NIC meeting agendas will include opportunities to share problems of practice, discuss learnings and reflections from PDSA cycles, and participation in learning tasks based on needs (e.g., planning for the implementation of EBPPIs); (3) coach NIC participants as they implement PDSA cycles and EBBPIs aligned to the new framework, evaluate the effects of the EBBPIs, implement practice–policy communication loops, and assess needs for future PL (e.g., science of math focus areas) and preferences for coaching supports; and (4) build SDDOE staff capacity to recruit NIC participants, to plan for and lead NIC convenings, and initiate changes through participation in PDSA feedback cycles.	Oct 2026– Sept 2027
In Year 4, the R8CC will (1) convene NIC participants and recruit new participants for an introduction to the framework and initial training in improvement science and the PDSA approach; and (2) build SDDOE staff capacity to recruit NIC participants, plan for and lead NIC convenings, and initiate changes through participation in PDSA feedback cycles.	Oct 2027– Sept 2028
In Year 5, the R8CC will (1) convene NIC participants and recruit new participants for an introduction to the framework and initial training in improvement science and the PDSA approach; and (2) focus on ensuring sustainability of the math framework by developing, providing, and disseminating implementation guidance of the framework, and ensuring preparedness to implement NICs.	Oct 2028– Sept 2029



**Table 22. 5-Year Service Plan: Increasing Math Achievement in Grades 4–8 Through High-Quality, Evidence-Based Instruction for All Learners**

Year(s)	Inputs	Capacity-Building Processes	Capacities Built	Outputs	Outcomes
1	HLP team and experts, including SDDOE's math and science specialist  SD Math Standards  Existing math frameworks (e.g., science of math), EBPPs, and resources	Develop a needs assessment Develop a logic model Identify math EBPPs  Plan for implementation of math EBPPs	Human capacity Organizational capacity Policy capacity  Resource capacity	Needs identified Logic model Mathematics framework  Rationale for selected EBPPs are reflected in the framework  SDDOE math team trained in the EBPPs aligned with the new framework	<u>Short-term:</u> Increase the SDDOE's knowledge of evidence-based Grades 4–8 math instruction and instructional frameworks  Increase the SDDOE's understanding of the landscape of Grades 4–8 math instruction and frameworks in use across SD  An evidence-based, SD math instructional framework for Grades 4–8
2–5	HLP team and experts, including SDDOE's math and science specialist  SD Math Standards  SD developed math framework, identified EBPPs, and resources (e.g., science of math)	Review/refine the HLP project logic model Plan for implementation of math EBPPs Implement EBPPs  Evaluate implementation of math EBPPs	Human capacity Organizational capacity	Refinement of the math framework Implementation plan developed (e.g., recruitment, training, and monitoring plans)  Content-specific training and support (e.g., NIC facilitation and coaching) provided; fidelity of implementation assessed  Monitoring site visits conducted, NIC learnings incorporated into the frameworks, and evaluation data incorporated in the implementation cycle	<u>Short-term:</u> Increased SEA and LEA knowledge of NICs (e.g., purpose, operation, implementation considerations)  <u>Mid-term:</u> Increased SEA and LEA capacity to implement and support continuous improvement of the new mathematical framework  Increased LEA and school capacity to implement high-quality math instruction in Grades 4–8 pilot teachers' classrooms with PDSA cycles integrated to accelerate teacher learning  <u>Long-term:</u> All SD students demonstrate proficiency in math by the 2032–33 school year (SD Administrative Rule 24:55:05:02)





## Wyoming's HLP: Retaining High-Quality Wyoming Department of Education (WDE) Staff to Enhance District and School Services (A-PR2 & R-AR1)

Through the *Retaining High-Quality WDE Staff to Enhance District and School Services* project, Wyoming's HLP team will assist the WDE to develop, implement, evaluate, and continuously improve a life cycle of employment and capacity-building plan to increase staff retention and job satisfaction so that WDE staff are able to provide high-quality assistance that supports districts and schools to improve student outcomes.

### Capacity-Building Services

- ESSA connections: Title I, Part A (closing the achievement gap for disadvantaged students)
- RAC Central Priority: Staff Shortages; Staff Recruitment, and Retention
- Raise the Bar: Boldly Improve Learning Conditions

**HLP.** State Superintendent of Public Instruction Megan Degenfelder and her leadership team identified a pressing concern: the challenge of retaining qualified staff within the WDE (personal communication, February 12, 2024). Recognizing that the skills and experiences of WDE employees directly influence the quality of supports they provide to districts and schools, and subsequently the outcomes that districts and schools attain for their students, the WDE leadership team is committed to addressing this issue.

The WDE is working toward six goals outlined in the Wyoming Education Reform Strategic Plan 2023–2027: (1) parental empowerment and eliminating political bias, (2) preparing students for jobs through career and technical education, (3) developing citizenship for students, (4) reducing bureaucracy and creating efficiencies, (5) valuing and supporting teachers, and (6) improving outcomes through early literacy (WDE, 2023). Achieving these strategic goals will require qualified staff possessing effective capacity-building strategies to provide TA services to districts and schools.

With an enrollment of 91,640 students and a dedicated workforce of 7,424 teachers across 342 schools, Wyoming’s educational landscape is expansive and diverse (WDE, 2024). Additionally, the identification of 69 low-performing schools—18 CSI schools, 35 TSI schools, and 16 schools to receive additional TSI (ATSI)—underscores the need for strategic intervention and support from knowledgeable and effective WDE staff (WDE, 2024). This support should encompass a proactive TA approach that honors the local context and is tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of each district and its school(s) (Fruchter et al., 1998; Mattson et al., 2023). By leveraging evidence-based practices, fostering collaboration among stakeholders, and aligning resources with identified priorities, WDE can empower educators and administrators to enact meaningful change and enhance student performance statewide (W. Maloney, Chief Policy Officer, personal communication, May 15, 2024).

**Client Needs.** Ensuring the successful realization of WDE’s strategic goals, and the delivery of high-quality TA to districts and schools includes two important factors: (1) the retention of skilled personnel and (2) improved staff job satisfaction. Over the last 6 months, the WDE experienced transitions within its school support program team, impacting the delivery of TA services to educational institutions statewide. Key changes occurred in pivotal roles, including the supervisor position for literacy, Wyoming accreditation and support, as well as the ESSA and Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) grant teams. These staff transitions are particularly significant given their importance in driving WDE’s TA and support initiatives. Despite recent legislative approval of 122 staff positions within the WDE, 10% of those positions remain vacant (W. Maloney, personal communication, May 15, 2024). Exit interviews conducted with departing staff, facilitated by WDE human resources (HR) personnel, unveiled recurring themes that shed light on the challenges contributing to staff turnover. These

include concerns regarding limited opportunities for career advancement, heavy workloads impacting work-life balance, inconsistent communication channels, and perceived gaps in PL opportunities (W. Maloney, personal communication, May 15, 2024). To begin to address these challenges, the WDE must undertake proactive measures focused on **retention by improving staff members’ job satisfaction and building their capacity to provide high-quality TA that supports districts and schools to improve student outcomes.**

**Capacity-Building Services.** The proposed 5-year project will establish a comprehensive framework to address the life cycle of employment within the WDE. By implementing strategic initiatives, the WDE will develop and retain qualified personnel and improve staff satisfaction, ultimately enhancing the department’s capacity and efficacy in serving the educational needs of Wyoming students. A life cycle of employment plan involves developing strategies to retain highly qualified staff members, provide PL opportunities to build staff capacity across all department levels, and improve staff job satisfaction. The project will offer a comprehensive approach to address staffing challenges within the WDE, with a focus on improving staff satisfaction, capacity building, and cultural transformation. By leveraging strategic initiatives and fostering collaboration, the project aims to build a resilient and effective workforce capable of driving positive educational outcomes for Wyoming’s students.

**Expected Outcomes.** Short-term outcomes for this project include (1) increased understanding of the importance of developing a capacity-building plan for a research-based life cycle of employment (*human capacity*); (2) increased understanding of factors affecting, and ways to improve, staff satisfaction (*human capacity*); and (3) increased understanding of factors affecting, and ways to improve, retention of qualified staff (*human capacity*). Mid-term outcomes include increased WDE capacity to (1) implement, evaluate, and update a life cycle of



employment capacity-building plan and structure (*human and organizational capacities*); (2) implement and evaluate staff satisfaction improvement strategies (*human and organizational capacities*); (3) create, implement, and evaluate PL opportunities and resources designed to improve staff capacity (*human and organizational capacities*); (4) develop policies and procedures to sustain staff capacity building (*policy capacity*); and (5) identify and maintain a central knowledge management repository to store capacity-building resources for easy access and sustainability (*resource and organizational capacity*). Finally, the project's long-term outcomes include (1) increased WDE staff retention, and (2) improved WDE staff job satisfaction.

**Project Leadership and Expertise.** Dr. Tara Isaacs, Executive Director of Learning Services at McREL, and Joe Simpson, R8CC's proposed director and current R11CC director, will each bring decades of experience leading change at all levels of the education system to their roles as co-leads of the HLP project team. The team will include WDE supervisors, directors, HR personnel, and other staff; as well as an expert on the life cycle of employment, Meghan Kandel, Senior Director of People and Culture at McREL. Representatives from the Wyoming Department of Administration and Information's HR Division, which strives to foster a work environment that promotes open communication, innovative ideas, and solutions, will serve as key partners in this work. The R8CC will also explore opportunities to collaborate with the National CC, including identifying opportunities to consult with peer SEAs that have, or are experiencing, similar challenges.

**Planned Services for Year 1.** Table 23 describes the planned milestones and timelines the Wyoming HLP team will complete in Year 1. Additional needs sensing to inform any changes or updates to the service plan will be completed within 90 days of the R8CC award.

**Table 23. Year 1 Milestones for Retaining High-Quality WDE Staff to Enhance District and School Services**

Year 1 Milestones	Timeframe
Review relevant data and set a shared intention for the work, create a team charter and logic model for the project, finalize the annual service plan, and establish a communications plan.	Oct–Dec 2024
Complete a literature review of the life cycle of employment components and elements to support a capacity-building plan, factors that influence staff job satisfaction and retention, and EBPPs to improve job satisfaction and retention.	Dec–Feb 2025
Identify, develop, or adapt a staff satisfaction survey informed by the literature review.	Mar–Apr 2025
Create a life cycle of employment capacity-building plan and begin identifying staff knowledge and skill requirements necessary to provide high-quality TA that supports districts and schools in improving student outcomes.	May–Jun 2025
Identify the needed learning opportunities and resources to support the life cycle of employment capacity-building plan and to improve staff capacity to provide high-quality TA to Wyoming schools and districts.	Jul–Aug 2025
Conduct an annual staff satisfaction survey and identify improvement topics.	Sept 2025

**Planned Services for Years 2–5.** R8CC services in Years 2–5, as shown in Table 24 will build on those provided in Year 1. Planning for each year will begin in the final quarter of the preceding year, informed by reflections on progress, and WDE’s readiness for the next phase(s) of the project. Timelines and milestones will be further specified when the annual service plan is developed with the HLP project team members and partners to reflect any changes in needs.

**Table 24. Years 2–5 Milestones to Retaining High-Quality WDE Staff to Enhance District and School Services**

Years 2–5 Milestones	Timeframe
Review data, reflect on progress and readiness for the next phases of the work; review and update the HLP project team charter and project logic model, as needed; and finalize the annual service plan.	Oct 2025–2029
In Year 2, the R8CC will: (1) conduct a staff satisfaction survey and implement staff satisfaction improvement strategies; (2) create PL opportunities and resources to support staff capacity building; (3) conduct and evaluate staff PL opportunities; (4) identify a central knowledge management repository to store capacity-building resources for easy access; and (5) conduct a second staff satisfaction survey to assess progress and identify improvement needs.	Oct 2025–Sept 2026
In Year 3, the R8CC will: (1) implement staff satisfaction improvement strategies; (2) continue to create PL opportunities and resources to support staff capacity building; (3) conduct and evaluate staff PL opportunities; (4) add resources to the central knowledge management repository; (5) develop policies and procedures to support the life cycle of employment capacity-building plan for sustainability; and (6) conduct a third staff satisfaction survey to assess progress and identify improvement needs.	Oct 2026–Sept 2027
In Year 4, the R8CC will: (1) implement staff satisfaction improvement strategies; (2) continue to create PL opportunities and resources to support staff capacity building; (3) conduct and evaluate staff PL opportunities; (4) add resources to the central knowledge management repository; (5) review/revise policies and procedures to support sustainability of the life cycle of employment capacity-building plan; and (6) conduct a fourth staff satisfaction survey to assess progress and identify improvement needs.	Oct 2027–Sept 2028
In Year 5, the R8CC will: (1) continue to implement its CIP to strengthen WDE staff members’ job satisfaction and retention, and grow their capacities to provide high-quality TA that supports districts and schools in improving student outcomes; and (2) develop a plan to sustain the life cycle of employment capacity-building plan and improvement efforts in the future.	Oct 2028–Sept 2029



**Table 25. 5-Year Service Plan: Retaining High-Quality WDE Staff to Enhance District and School Services**

Year(s)	Inputs	Capacity-Building Processes	Capacities Built	Outputs	Outcomes
1	HLP project team members and experts WY Department of Administration and Information partners National CC Perceptions of WDE staff regarding job satisfaction and needs to improve capacity-building services and supports for schools and districts	Develop a needs assessment Develop a logic model Identify EBPPIs Plan for implementation of EBPPIs	Human capacity	Logic model Literature review Research-based life cycle of employment components and elements Capacity-building plan for WDE staff Staff satisfaction survey and results	<u>Short-term:</u> Increased WDE understanding of the importance of developing a research-based life cycle of employment capacity-building plan Increased WDE understanding of factors affecting, and ways to improve, staff satisfaction Increased WDE understanding of factors affecting, and ways to improve, retentions of qualified staff
2–5	HLP project team members and experts WY Department of Administration and Information partners National CC Perceptions of WDE staff regarding job satisfaction and needs to improve capacity-building services and supports for schools and districts Literature review completed in Year 1 Results from Year 1 WDE satisfaction survey	Review/refine the HLP project logic model Plan for implementation of EBPPIs Implement EBPPIs Evaluate implementation of EBPPIs	Human capacity Organizational capacity Resource capacity Policy capacity	Updated logic model PL plan PL resources PL opportunities Central knowledge management repository of capacity-building resources Policies and procedures	<u>Mid-term:</u> Increased WDE capacity to implement, evaluate, and update a life cycle of employment capacity-building plan and structure Increased WDE capacity to implement and evaluate staff satisfaction improvement strategies Increased WDE capacity to create, implement, and evaluate PL opportunities and resources designed to improve staff capacity Increased WDE capacity to develop policies and procedures that will sustain staff capacity building Increased WDE capacity to identify and maintain a central knowledge management repository to store capacity-building resources for easy access and sustainability <u>Long-term:</u> Improved WDE staff satisfaction Increased WDE staff retention





## **South Dakota's HLP #2: Circles of Reflection (CoR) to Improve Native American Student Well-Being (A-PR2 & R-AR1)**

The *Circles of Reflection to Improve Native American Student Well-Being* project will support the South Dakota Department of Tribal Relations (SDDTR), LEAs, schools, and their local/regional partners to implement new policies and structures to support Native American students' well-being so that proficiency in reading and math improve and on-time graduation rates increase.

### **Capacity-Building Services**

- ESSA connections: Title I, Part A (closing the achievement gap for disadvantaged students)
- RAC Central Priority: Students' Mental Health and Well-Being
- Raise the Bar: Achieve Academic Excellence and Boldly Improve Learning Conditions

**HLP.** "Well-being" is used across various fields of study to include wellness, health, and happiness (Bautista et al., 2023). Social-emotional well-being has emerged as a critical component of a well-rounded education to help students reach their academic potential (Hart et al., 2019; O'Connor et al., 2019; Panayiotou et al., 2019). Through attention to this important aspect of a child's development, students become self-aware, regulate their emotions, and build positive social interactions that create a foundation for academic success (Taylor et al., 2017). Various factors influence students' social-emotional well-being, such as neurobiological, individual lifestyle factors, family, community, and society (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [NASEM], 2019). While many of these factors are not easily addressed through classroom instruction, it is well documented that school supports and climate play an important role in either supporting or undermining student well-being and resiliency (MacNeil et al., 2009; Mann et al., 2015; NASEM, 2019, 2021; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2021). Positive social environments in schools and classrooms are central to Indigenous children's ability to thrive academically and develop essential social skills and emotional well-being (Smoker Broadus, 2017). Academic

performance is one key indicator of school climate (National School Climate Center, n.d.).

Native American students have historically fared worse on academic outcomes than their peers (Howard, 2019; Kao & Thompson, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Larimore & McClellan, 2005).

In South Dakota, 13% of students identify as American Indian/Alaska Native, compared to just 1% across all U.S. schools (McMahon et al., 2023), making attention to this at-risk population a priority within the state. As described in the earlier section on our understanding of the Region 8 states, Native American students scored

below their non-Native peers on all academic indicators (see Figures 5–8).

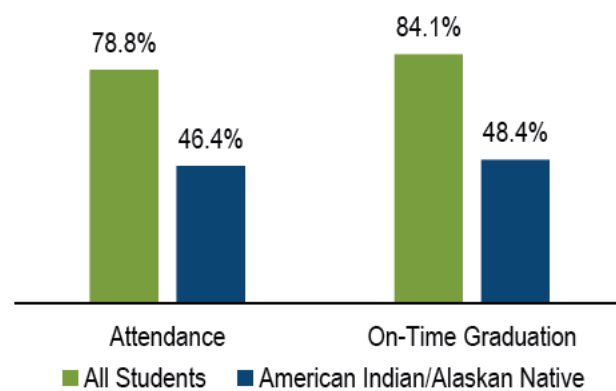
Attendance and on-time graduation rates

also lag, with Native American student

attendance and on-time graduation rates

more than 20 percentage points lower than

those for all students (see Figure 11).



**Figure 11. Attendance and Graduation Rates for Native American Students**

Academic performance is important to students' social-emotional well-being, as performing well academically can build students' self-esteem and confidence and prepare them for challenges they may face as adults (Hart et al., 2019; O'Connor et al., 2019; Panayiotou et al., 2019). Conversely, academic struggles can lead to feelings of frustration, low self-worth, and increased emotional and behavioral issues (Chitrakar & Nisanth, 2023). For Native American students, who face unique sociocultural challenges, this relationship becomes particularly salient (Adams, 1995; Dapice, 2006).

School safety is another key indicator of school climate known to directly influence student well-being. While there is a lack of publicly available data on Native American students' well-



being, students in South Dakota overall experience higher levels of bullying and threats or injuries with a weapon on school property (see Figure 12; National American Indian & Alaska

Native School Mental Health Technology

Transfer Center Network [NAI/AN

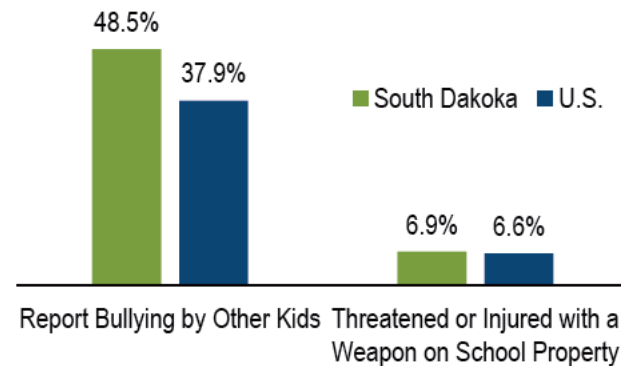
Network], 2021). Native American students,

often attending predominately White

schools, may be at an increased risk of

experiencing discrimination, bullying

victimization, and violence at school



**Figure 12. Bullying and Physical Violence Among South Dakota Students**

(NAI/AN Network, 2021). Experiencing bullying at school may inhibit critical development of social skills and hinder emotional well-being. Victims of violence in school not only face threats to their physical health, but also have a greater risk of developing mental health and academic issues (Mass General Brigham-McLean Hospital, 2024; Myers & Cowie, 2017). Additionally, Native American students report significantly higher substance use rates than other students, which affects their physical health, mental well-being, and prospects for the future (American Psychological Association, 2014; Soto et al, 2022). Clearly, Native American students' well-being is a HLP in South Dakota.

**Client Needs.** While some South Dakota schools implement programs intended to improve student academic performance, foster physical and social-emotional well-being, and prevent substance use, it is unclear to what extent those schools are delivering culturally relevant lessons that are evidence-based. Imposing standardized programs with these aims ignores the important cultural context of Native American students in South Dakota, which likely hinders program effectiveness (Sotero, 2006; Vaught & Castagno, 2008).



It is important to note that many Tribal organizations have wellness and support programs for their members, including students. However, due to governmental control/Tribal sovereignty, it is often difficult to understand what wellness supports and services are offered and accessed by Native American students in South Dakota (J. Graves, personal communication, March 11, 2024), and to identify gaps in available resources and services, as well as assess the effectiveness of existing curricula and supports for Native American students across the state. Similarly, Secretary Dave Flute and Director Fred Osborn at the Office of Indian Education at the SDDTR affirmed these challenges, identifying Native American student well-being as a HLP in the state (D. Flute & F. Osborn, personal communication, April 2, 2024).

**Engaging Multiple Voices and Perspectives in Building Common Ground.** This project builds upon the SDDTR's current work to improve Native American student well-being. In 2020, a literature review was completed by the R11CC (Jones et al.) to identify approaches to social-emotional well-being shown to have positive impacts for Native American students, and a survey was conducted in May/June 2024 to gather information on Native American student wellness and mental health needs and current supports in South Dakota.

Designed to support Tribal engagement and strengthen relationships between education agencies to produce better supports for students, Circles of Reflection (CoR) helps recipients reflect on the needs of Native American students and identify strategies to transform their education (Smoker Broaddus & Bitterman, 2023). A collaborative, three-part conversation, the CoR brings together diverse voices of Tribal leaders, SEA representatives, and others to engage in rich discussions to understand and build consensus on steps to improve education opportunities for Native American students.

**Capacity-Building Services.** The R8CC will use the CoR framework and toolkit developed by the National CC to bring together the SDDOE, SDDTR, and the four TEAs (Departments in South Dakota [TEDS]) in reflective discussion, strategic planning, and action to meet the need of Native American student wellness and well-being in the state. Aligned to the stages of implementation, the use of CoR during the first project year will result in a needs assessment, logic model, selection of an evidence-based intervention that is culturally appropriate, and creation of a 90-day action plan. In subsequent years, action plans will be implemented and evaluated to inform continuous improvement. Repeated in Years 3 and 5 to sustain engagement of leaders across the state in this improvement effort, the CoR process will promote the iterative refinement of goals and action plans based on evaluation results, and result in a plan to scale and sustain what works to improve student well-being.

**Expected Outcomes.** Short-term outcomes for this project include (1) increased awareness and understanding of current student wellness services among CoR recipients (*human capacity*), as well as increased understanding of (2) the gaps in services to support Native American student well-being (*human capacity*), and (3) the policy levers and structures that could better support Native American student well-being (*organizational and policy capacities*). Mid-term outcomes include increased capacity of the SDDTR and CoR recipients to (1) implement new policies and support structures designed to improve Native American student well-being (*policy and organizational capacity*), and (2) implement programs and services that support Native American student well-being (*human and organizational capacities*). Successful attainment of the short- and mid-term outcomes will lead to better academic and behavioral outcomes for Native American students. Long-term outcomes include increased proficiency in math and reading, and improved on-time graduation rates for Native American students. These outcomes,

including any adjustments or additions, will be affirmed through the CoR and be informed by the Lakota Medicine Wheel (see Figure 13; Dapice, 2006; Kemppainen et al., 2008; Mashford-

Pringle & Shawanda, 2023) to

foster long-term impacts of

improvement efforts. The

Medicine Wheel represents a

shared worldview (i.e.,

knowledge, values, beliefs)

among Indigenous cultures that

aligns with the four directions of

a compass—the spiritual in the

North, emotional in the South,

mental in the East, and physical in the West—and supports Native wellness and well-being.

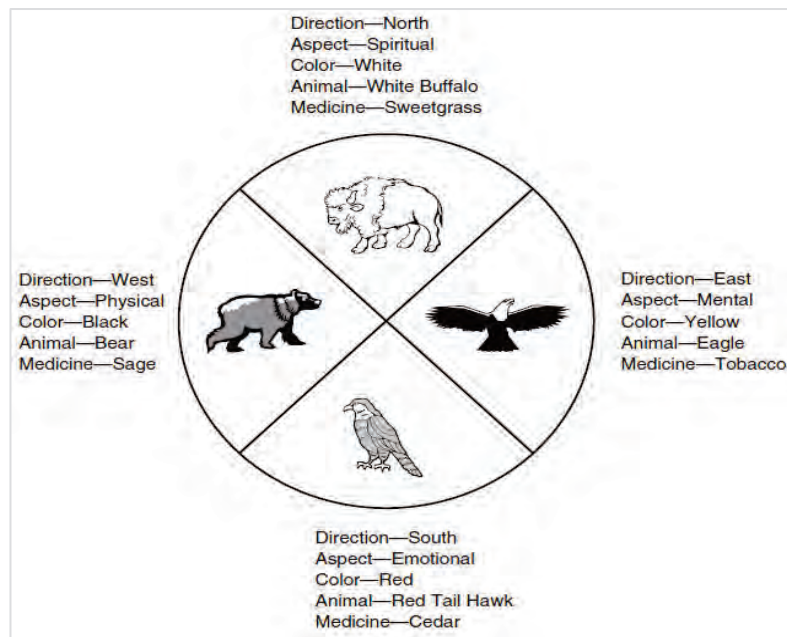


Figure 13. The Lakota Medicine Wheel (Dapice, 2006, p. 252)

**Project Leadership and Expertise.** Drs. Dorothy Aguilera-Black Bear and Katie Allen will co-lead this project. Dr. Aguilera-Black Bear, based in South Dakota, has extensive experience and expertise conducting research with Indigenous people including delivering TA and capacity-building services for South Dakota educators and students through the CC program. Dr. Allen has experience with participatory research practices focused on student outcomes, social-emotional character development, and delivering capacity building and TA services through the CC program. The R8CC team will also include Dr. Jordyn Gunville-Pourier, a research scientist at Child Trends who supports research and evaluation focused on the well-being of Indigenous children, youth, and families. Dr. Gunville-Pourier is also an enrolled member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe and was born and raised on the Cheyenne River Sioux Indian Reservation. The



project co-leads will also contact the National CC to identify other relevant materials and resources that may be available from the CCNetwork to support this project.

**Planned Services for Year 1.** Table 26 describes the planned milestones and timelines the South Dakota student well-being HLP team will complete in Year 1. Additional needs sensing will be completed within 90 days of the R8CC award to inform any changes or updates to the service plan.

**Table 26. Year 1 Milestones for South Dakota CoR to Meet the Needs of Native American Student Well-Being**

Year 1 Milestones	Timeframe
Review relevant data and set a shared intention for the work, create a logic model for the project, finalize the annual service plan, and establish a communications plan.	Oct–Dec 2024
Complete a needs assessment using the CoR process: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Circle facilitation will describe the SDDOE, SDDTR, and TEDs current policies, programs, and practices related to Native American student wellness and well-being.</li> <li>• Second Circle facilitation will bring together the TEDs and LEAs to “validate, add to, or clarify” the developed descriptions about current SEA support in the First Circle, discuss perceptions of effectiveness, and prioritize what to move forward. This process will incorporate findings from a student wellness survey completed in May/June 2024 by the R11CC for South Dakota. Survey results summarize current wellness and mental health supports that LEAs provide to support Native American students, as well as existing gaps in services.</li> <li>• Third Circle facilitation will be used to develop a 90-day action plan, including identifying and selecting EBPPIs, assessing readiness and identification of longer-term (i.e., Ambitious) goals aligned to the Medicine Wheel. EBPPIs, including a 2020 literature review (Jones et al.), specific to serving Native American students will be considered.</li> </ul>	Dec–Jun 2025
Develop and implement a 90-day action plan as part of the CoR process.	Jul 2025
Identify CoR Ambitious goals based on the 90-day results and align EBPPIs.	Sept 2025
Assess readiness to implement EBPPIs.	Sept 2025

**Planned Services for Years 2–5.** R8CC services in Years 2–5, as shown in Table 27, will build on those provided in Year 1. Planning for each year will begin in the final quarter of the preceding year, informed by ongoing needs sensing, reflections on progress, and readiness for the next phase(s) of the project. Timeframes and milestones for Years 2–5 will be further specified when annual service plans are developed in collaboration with clients, partners, recipients, and other interested groups to reflect any changes in needs.



**Table 27. Years 2–5 Milestones for South Dakota CoR to Meet the Needs of Native American Student Well-Being**

Years 2–5 Milestones	Timeframe
Review data, reflect on progress and readiness for the next phases of work; review and update the project logic model, as needed; submit draft and final annual service plans according to guidance provided by ED.	Oct 2025–2029
Develop an action plan to address Ambitious Goals.	Oct–Dec 2025
Develop materials, resources, and supports related to implementation of EBPPIs.	Jan–Mar 2026
Implement Ambitious Goals action plan.	Apr 2026–Sept 2029
Ongoing stakeholder engagement through the CoR to assess implementation and revise the implementation plans (if needed).	Oct 2025–Sept 2029
Complete a full 2nd cycle of CoR in Year 3 to discuss progress and identify areas for improvement.	Oct 2026–Mar 2027
Complete a final CoR cycle process in Year 5.	Oct 2028–Mar 2029
Finalize plan to scale-up and sustain project outcomes.	Mar–Jun 2029
Develop and disseminate stories to share project successes, impacts, and lessons learned.	Jun–Sept 2029

**Table 28. 5-Year Service Plan: Milestones for South Dakota CoR to Meet the Needs of Native American Student Well-Being**

Year(s)	Inputs	Capacity-Building Processes	Capacities Built	Outputs	Outcomes
1	HLP partners, stakeholders, and experts:  Representatives from TEDs  SDDOE & SDDTR  Native Education Collaborative's CoR Toolkit	Develop needs assessment  Develop logic model  Identify EBPPIs  Plan for the implementation of EBPPIs	Human capacity  Policy capacity  Organizational capacity	Needs identified  Logic model  CoR results  90-day action plan  Ambitious Goals  Readiness assessed  Stakeholder collaboration and communication plan	<u>Short-term:</u> Increased awareness and understanding of student wellness services among CoR recipients  Increased understanding of the gaps in services to support for Native American student well-being among CoR recipients  Increased understanding of policy levers and structures that could better support Native American student well-being among CoR recipients and the SDDTR
2–5	HLP partners, stakeholders, and experts:  Representatives from TEDs  SDDOE & SDDTR  Information from CoR process & 90-day action plans  Native Education Collaborative's CoR Toolkit	Implement EBPPIs  Monitor and evaluate EBPPIs	Human capacity  Policy capacity  Organizational capacity	CoR results (2 cycles)  Ambitious Goals action plan  Materials/resources developed that align to Ambitious Goals action plan implementation  Sustainability plan  Evaluation reports	<u>Mid-term:</u> Increased capacity of the SDDTR and CoR recipients to implement new policies and support structures designed to improve Native American student well-being  Increased capacity of SDDTR and CoR recipients to implement programs and services that support Native American student well-being  <u>Long-term:</u> Increased proficiency in math and reading, and improved on-time graduation rates for Native American students

## **Quality of the R8CC's Project Design and Management Plan (SC-B)**

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We know from experience that to successfully help R8CC clients solve their HLPs through capacity-building activities that are high quality, useful, and relevant, we must ensure there are systems and processes to organize and operationalize our work. In this section, we discuss McREL's project design and management experience; our performance management and evaluation system processes; our comprehensive communication and dissemination plan to ensure robust outreach and engagement with clients and potential and current recipients of services; and our personnel management system to ensure we are providing high-quality partnerships with external subject-matter and technical experts, the CCNetwork, and other federally funded TA centers.

### **McREL's Project Design and Management Experience (A-AR6)**

With a nearly 60-year history of successfully delivering on large grants and contracts for federal and non-federal funding agencies, McREL has standardized practices for designing and managing our work to create conditions that allow flexibility while still supporting effective and efficient service delivery. Our project design approach is collaborative to ensure our work is responsive to client needs, considers local context, and has a strong likelihood of accomplishing the client's goals.

#### ***Project Management***

Our project management processes are derived from the Project Management Institute (pmi.org) and support our work from initiation through closure. Recognizing that our work is complex and dynamic, we build flexibility into our processes for staffing, scheduling, budgeting, monitoring, and risk management to minimize the effect of inevitable barriers. Our professional project management practices are designed to support knowledge management; we use platforms



such as Microsoft SharePoint to facilitate collaboration and shared access to resources, including working documents, timelines, and meeting notes. Additionally, McREL has its own Institutional Review Board (IRB), which reviews all work involving data to ensure our processes and procedures protect human rights. Working together, our established project design and project management processes will allow us to quickly identify potential problems in carrying out the R8CC's activities, respond appropriately, and ensure that our services are timely and responsive.

### *Quality Assurance (QA)*

All project and communication materials—such as presentation agendas and materials, performance reports to ED, literature reviews, website content, and policy scans—undergo a rigorous QA review process prior to public/stakeholder dissemination. The review process ensures that adequate time is allocated to review work products in accordance with professional standards, and that products are of high quality based on four key dimensions: (1) relevance, (2) significance of content, (3) clarity and focus of artifact, and (4) utility of information for the intended audience.

Using a tiered approach, materials are reviewed by designated individuals depending on the type of product. For example, a resource developed as part of a state's HLP project is reviewed by the respective HLP co-leads, regional members or clients of the HLP team, an R8CC communications team member, and the R8CC director or deputy directors. If a deliverable warrants review by external subject-matter or technical experts, which may include advisory board members or other experts selected for their research or content expertise, a request will be made for review and feedback.

## Effective Performance Management and Evaluation System (SC-B1, A-PR3, & A-AR7)

In this section, we describe our system for performance management that integrates formative (internal evaluation) and summative (external evaluation) processes for continuous improvement. The R8CC will use complementary internal and external evaluation processes to support and assess its success in achieving client outcomes (Figure 14). This approach is informed by McREL’s extensive program evaluation experience, including 19 years evaluating numerous CCs. This capacity allows us to be both nimble in service for the HLP teams and

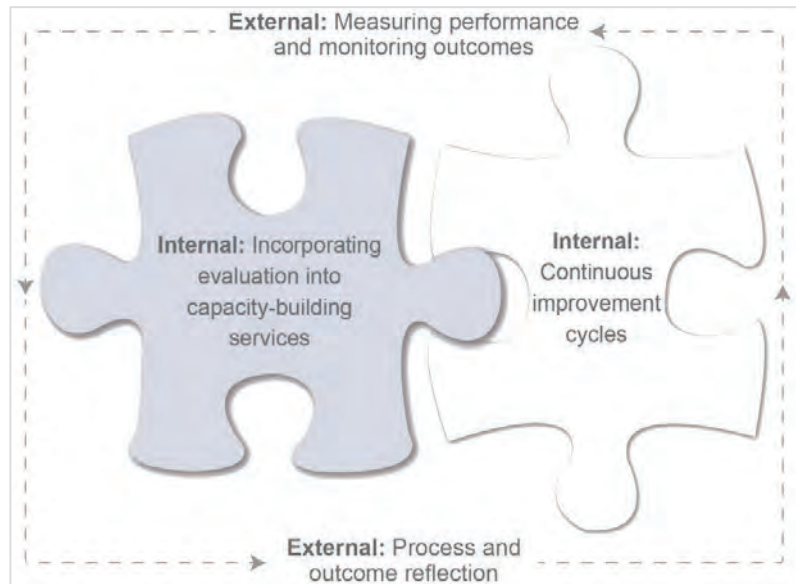


Figure 14. Complementary Roles of Internal and External Evaluation

rigorous for accountability. All of the capacity-building services provided through the R8CC will include an internal evaluator who will help the HLP teams use evaluation tools and methods to plan, monitor, reflect on, and adapt their work to achieve its intended outcomes. The internal evaluator will also support continuous improvement cycles resulting in systemic change. The external evaluator, also a McREL employee who, unlike the internal evaluator, *is not* a member of the HLP team, will provide objective assessment of the R8CC, measuring performance and monitoring progress toward the short-, mid-, and long-term outcomes detailed in the annual service plans. We describe our plan to maintain the integrity of the external evaluation below in the Maintaining the Integrity of the External Evaluator section.

Our evaluation plan incorporates the standardized CCNetwork Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) measures. Using Figure 14 to organize the plan, we present a description of the functions of the internal evaluation, followed by the functions of the external evaluation.

### *Internal Evaluation Builds Implementation Capacity*

The proposed R8CC team includes an internal evaluator with expertise in logic models, evaluation capacity building, continuous improvement, and data visualization. The internal evaluator also has experience translating research for practitioner audiences and facilitating reflective, data-based conversations that lead to improved implementation to ensure the HLP teams integrate monitoring and evaluation into capacity-building activities across the six-phase CIP (Figure 2, p. 10).

**Incorporating Evaluation into Capacity-Building Services.** Beyond providing discrete capacity-building services to effect change in one area of a system, such as teacher PL or coaching school leaders, the R8CC will serve as a facilitator of change at multiple levels by (1) helping SEAs/clients identify the “underlying system dynamics, structures, and conditions” (Hargreaves, 2010, p. 5) associated with the HLP and (2) collaborating with SEAs, REAs, TEAs, and LEAs to build their capacity to achieve intended outcomes. Given this, our internal evaluation supports will also use a systems approach, helping the HLP teams and our clients reflect on the dynamic influence of interrelationships, perspectives, boundaries, and dynamics toward achieving intended outcomes (Systems in Evaluation Topical Interest Group of the American Evaluation Association, 2018).

We embedded our internal evaluation supports in the six-phase CIP. Additionally, McREL already uses, and will continue to use, instruments and resources, either as is or modified, from AIRN, ED, The Evaluation Center at Western Michigan University, Harvard University, and the



Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (see Table 29). We also will develop tools, as needed, to enhance capacity-building approaches.

**Table 29. Alignment of Phases of Implementation to Other Evidence-Based Continuous Improvement Processes, and Select Internal Evaluation Supports**

Phase of the CIP	Select Internal Evaluation Tools and Resources
Assessing needs	Heptagon Tool <sup>a</sup> ; Assessing Drivers Best Practices <sup>b</sup> ; Readiness for Organizational Change Scale <sup>c</sup>
Developing logic models	Checklist of Key Considerations for Development of Program Logic Models <sup>d</sup> ; Logic Models for Selecting, Designing, and Implementing Evidence-Based School Leadership Interventions <sup>e</sup> ; Logic Models for Program Design, Implementation, and Evaluation: Workshop Toolkit <sup>f</sup>
Selecting EBPPs	Heptagon Tool <sup>a</sup> ; Non-Regulatory Guidance: Using Evidence to Strengthen Education Investments <sup>g</sup> ; What Works Clearinghouse <sup>h</sup> ; Identifying and Implementing Educational Practices Supported by Rigorous Evidence: A User Friendly Guide <sup>i</sup> ; Resources to Support EPB Step 2: Select Relevant EBPs <sup>j</sup> ; Evidence-based Improvement Guide: A Guide for States to Improve Their Frameworks and Supports Aligned to the Evidence Requirements of ESSA <sup>k</sup> ; Selecting EBPs for Tiers 1, 2 and 3: Navigating Clearinghouses and Databases <sup>l</sup>
Planning for the implementation of EBPPs	Installation Stage Action Planning Guide <sup>m</sup> ; Planning Realistic Implementation and Maintenance by Educators (PRIME) <sup>n</sup>
Supporting the implementation of EBPPs	Initial Implementation Action Planning Guide <sup>m</sup>
Evaluating EBPPs	Implementation Quotient <sup>o</sup> ; Leveraging Education Data Systems for Continuous Improvement <sup>p</sup>

Note: <sup>a</sup> Van Dyke et al., 2019; <sup>b</sup> Fixsen et al., 2018; <sup>c</sup> Holt et al., 2007; <sup>d</sup> MacDonald, 2018; <sup>e</sup> Daugherty et al., 2017; <sup>f</sup> Shakman & Rodriguez, 2015; <sup>g</sup> ED, 2016, 2023; <sup>h</sup> IES, 2024; <sup>i</sup> Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy, 2003; <sup>j</sup> State Support Network at AIR, 2020b; <sup>k</sup> Hale et al., 2017; <sup>l</sup> State Support Network at AIR, 2020c; <sup>m</sup> Blasé et al., 2013; <sup>n</sup> University of Connecticut, 2014; <sup>o</sup> Fixsen et al., 2019; <sup>p</sup> State Support Network at AIR, 2020a.

**Understanding State Contexts.** Our six-phase CIP is premised on the understanding that SEAs must be responsive to new learning, emerging needs, and shifting priorities—and that our TA services must help SEAs understand and respond to these changes. Therefore, our internal evaluator will support the HLP teams with ongoing monitoring of the local, state, and federal contexts to ensure we understand and timely respond to changes that may impact the success of our projects.

**Readiness.** The R8CC team will use McREL’s Assessing SEA Readiness for Change Tool (McREL, 2019) to consider the readiness of clients and recipients of services. The Assessing SEA Readiness for Change Tool has a set of guiding questions for each HLP team to collaboratively respond. The tool uses organizational readiness and change process research

(Capacity Building Center for States, 2018; Scaccia et al., 2015) and aligns to the four dimensions of capacity building described above (human, organizational, policy, and resource) and identified in the CC Program Notice Inviting Applications (NIA; 2024). The tool defines “readiness” as the extent to which an organization is both willing (motivation) and able (foundationally and specifically for the intervention) to put new programs and practices (i.e., EBBPIs) in place. Foundational readiness is based on an organization’s healthy functioning, such as how well it engages its staff in working toward a common goal and leads the change process. Intervention-specific readiness (i.e., EBPPI-specific readiness) is based on the conditions needed to implement a particular program or practice effectively.

**Continuous Improvement Cycles.** In addition to supporting the six-phase CIP (Figure 2 and as presented in the R8CC Logic Model, Figure 3), the internal evaluation will support the use of several strategies to monitor client satisfaction and continuously improve service delivery for our clients. These include regular feedback surveys, review of meeting notes, and debriefs with clients, and recipients as needed. An iterative improvement cycle will be employed with all HLP projects, including regularly checking in with clients, adjusting the plan as warranted, and ensuring that service delivery is meeting their needs.

By consistently incorporating information received from the feedback surveys, meetings, PL session debriefs, and short-cycle evaluation (such as a PDSA process), R8CC staff will model a culture of continuous improvement for SEA staff. Also, by developing data collection instruments, the R8CC will ensure that the SEAs are well-equipped to incorporate continuous improvement processes in the HLP projects and as a part of their ongoing operations.

*Firewalled External Evaluation Provides Objectivity and Accountability*

The external evaluator will provide an independent, objective assessment of the R8CC by evaluating progress toward identified outcomes and reporting on the GPRA measures identified for the CC Program in annual progress reports and evaluation reports. The external evaluator has extensive experience with evaluation methods and approaches, including program evaluation, GPRA measures, and CC evaluations. Evaluation methods and instruments will be developed collaboratively with each HLP team to ensure they accurately and comprehensively capture intended and unintended outcomes, and provide meaningful information to ED, team members, clients, and partners, thereby complementing the capacity building and continuous improvement supports provided by the R8CC internal evaluation (Figure 14).

**Maintaining the Integrity of the External Evaluator.** McREL has several organizational processes to support the independence and integrity of the R8CC external evaluation while providing the HLP teams and R8CC leaders with objective, reliable, and valid information about their performance. First, our external evaluator will be situated within McREL's Research and Evaluation Department (see organizational chart in Figure 15, p. 103). R8CC leadership will not have direct coaching, supervision, or performance management responsibilities for the external evaluator. Second, McREL's IRB will approve the external evaluation. Our human subjects and concomitant data management processes are designed to ensure that recipients' rights and information are protected. Accordingly, the external evaluator will use a secure SharePoint site for all project documents, including meeting notes and data. This site will not be accessible by R8CC team members. McREL's external evaluator, as well as McREL's Chief Research and Evaluation Officer, Vice President of Large Programs, and IRB Chair will all ensure the processes outlined in the IRB application are explicitly followed and the firewall maintained to



ensure the integrity of the external evaluation. Third, the external evaluator will have their own project code and budget for the R8CC evaluation work. This financial autonomy will allow the external evaluator to operate independently, without oversight from R8CC leadership.

**Measuring and Monitoring Performance: Satisfaction, Reach, Use, and Impact.** The external evaluator will collect and report on data to inform the four GPRA measures used to evaluate the effectiveness of the CC Program and use an objective lens to interpret data, provide formative feedback, and determine whether short-, mid-, and long-term outcomes have been achieved. The external evaluator will participate in workgroups convened by ED and the National CC, and follow all guidance provided by ED as it relates to the GPRA measures.

***GPRA Measure 1: Client Satisfaction.*** The first performance measure assesses the extent to which R8CC clients are satisfied with the quality, relevance, and usefulness of the services provided. Twice a year and after key capacity-building services, the external evaluator will survey and/or interview R8CC clients to gather satisfaction data as it relates to quality, relevance, and usefulness. The external evaluator will analyze the percentage of respondents who indicate that R8CC services are high quality, highly relevant, and highly useful to educational policy or practice, and will report on R8CC performance twice per year: in the annual performance report (APR; i.e., ED 524B) and the annual evaluation report (AER) submitted to ED. The R8CC goal for GPRA Measure 1, consistent with the guidance provided by ED, is 80% of clients in Year 1 (85% in Years 2–5) report they are satisfied or very satisfied with R8CC capacity-building services (i.e., indicating a “4” or “5” on a 5-point survey scale).

***GPRA Measure 2: Reaching Intended Clients and Recipients.*** The second performance measure captures the extent to which the R8CC provides services and products to a wide range of recipients. At the midpoint and end of each project year, the HLP team will identify the

recipients of our capacity-building services and products. The external evaluator will report this information on the Recipient Group Tracking Matrix developed by the ED Evaluation Workgroup. A description of the services and products will also be denoted. Goals for serving recipient types will be consistent with the guidance provided by ED for GPRA Measure 2.

***GPRA Measure 3: Progress Towards Agreed Upon Outputs and Milestones, and Responsiveness to Changes in State Contexts.*** The third performance measure shows the extent to which the R8CC demonstrates that the capacity-building services proposed in the annual service plans are implemented as intended (i.e., fidelity of implementation). For this measure, we use the ED definition of fidelity of implementation as adherence to the milestones and outputs on the annual service plans. We also include items to inform whether services are responsive to state needs and changing contexts.

At the end of each quarter, McREL's external evaluator will review each project management plan and associated evidence (e.g., meeting agendas, notes, participation lists, briefs, survey results) to ascertain whether the milestone or output has been completed on time.

The R8CC will use ED's standard measures for GPRA 3 for the APR and AER. Consistent with the guidance provided by ED, key clients will respond to nine survey items for GPRA Measure 3 regarding the implementation of R8CC services (see Table 30).

**Table 30. GPRA 3: Extent to Which Clients Agree that CC Capacity-Building Services Were Implemented as Intended**

Survey Items
The annual service plans are based on high-priority needs identified by the state.
CC capacity-building services are delivered as agreed upon with the state.
The CC's approach to capacity-building services is personalized to address the state's identified needs.
CC capacity-building services are aligned to the state strategic plan or ESSA goals.
CC capacity-building services provided by the R8CC are evidence-based.
CC capacity-building services are delivered in a timely manner.
The R8CC works with the state in a collaborative manner.
The R8CC works with the state in a manner that fosters a trusting relationship.
R8CC staff who deliver capacity-building services to the state have the necessary knowledge and skills.



Responses of “agree” and “strongly agree” on a 5-point response scale (*strongly disagree, disagree, neither disagree nor agree, agree, strongly agree*) will be calculated to determine the R8CC’s performance, with a goal of 80% agreement. An “I don’t know” response option will be added for respondents who may not be able to rate an item, and “I don’t know” responses will be excluded from the denominator. The R8CC goal for GPRA Measure 3, consistent with the guidance provided by ED, is 80% of milestones and 80% of outputs are completed, as well as 80% of clients’ agreement on aspects related to fidelity of implementation of the R8CC’s capacity-building services (i.e., indicating a “4” or “5” on a 5-point survey scale). Open-ended questions will encourage clients to expand on their responses.

***GPRA Measure 4: Progress Toward Outcomes.*** The fourth performance measure assesses the extent to which the R8CC demonstrates that recipient outcomes were met. McREL’s external evaluator will examine outcomes consistent with those identified in the R8CC logic model (Figure 3) and as detailed in the annual service plans. The evaluation will use a variety of measures including surveys, interviews, and document and artifact reviews. Given the systems nature of the HLPs, each project in the short-term will build capacity in two or more of the four dimensions: human, organizational, policy, and resource. Table 31 depicts the four capacity types and details how the capacity-building outcomes are defined within each project’s logic model, and how activities are assessed at the short-term (after 1 year), mid-term (after 2–3 years), and long-term (after 4–5 years).

**Table 31. Capacity Types and Measurement of Select Short-, Mid-, and Long-Term Outcomes**

Capacity	Short-Term Outcomes	Mid-Term Outcomes	Long-Term Outcomes
<b>Human capacity</b> means development or improvement of individual knowledge, skills, technical expertise, and the ability to adapt and be resilient to policy and leadership changes.	Self-reported or assessed (e.g., pre-post) changes in individual knowledge, skills, expertise, and resiliency	Observed or assessed changes to implementation practices that will endure (application of EBPPs, etc.)	Changes in educational opportunities for all students, and especially for groups of students with the greatest need



Capacity	Short-Term Outcomes	Mid-Term Outcomes	Long-Term Outcomes
<b>Organizational capacity</b> means structures that support clear communication and a shared understanding of an organization's visions and goals, and delineated individual roles and responsibilities in functional areas.	Self-reported understanding of vision and goals/role in achieving vision and goals Self-reported understanding of roles and responsibilities aligned to job descriptions	Development of structures that support the implementation of communication structures and delineated roles and responsibilities (communications plans, job descriptions, knowledge management site, etc.)	Improved quality of instruction for all students, and especially for groups of students with the greatest need Changes in student outcomes (e.g., test scores, attendance, graduation rates, dropout rates) for all students, and especially for groups of students with the greatest need
<b>Policy capacity</b> means structures that support alignment, differentiation, or enactment of local, state, and federal policies and initiatives.	Self-reported understanding of local, state, and/or federal policies and initiatives	Processes/guidance to interpret or support the implementation of differentiate local, state, and/or federal policies and initiatives Development or enactment of local, state, and/or federal policies and initiatives	Narrowing of achievement gaps for all students, and especially for groups of students with the greatest need
<b>Resource capacity</b> means tangible materials and assets that support alignment and use of federal, state, private, and local funds.	Self-reported understanding of existing and needed resources and assets	Development of materials and/or assets (professional learning materials, instructional guides, implementation guides, etc.) to support implementation	

Note. Consistent with the CC Program NIA (2024), short-term outcomes are the effects of receiving capacity-building services after 1 year. Mid-term outcomes are the effects of receiving capacity-building services after 2–3 years. Long-term outcomes are the effects of receiving capacity-building services after 4–5 years. Students with the greatest need include students from low-income families and students attending schools implementing CSI, TSI, or ATSI activities under ESEA, Section 1111(d).

The R8CC will use ED's standard measures for GPRA 4 for the APR (formative) and AER (summative). Consistent with the guidance provided by ED, the R8CC will report (1) the percent of short-term outcomes met (due by mid-year for the APR and by end-of-year for the AER); and (2) as appropriate based on the dimensions of capacity building for each HLP project, survey key clients on items regarding the demonstration of recipient outcomes (see Table 32).

**Table 32. GPRA 4: Extent to Which Recipient Outcomes Were Met**

Item Stem: To what extent has the R8CC project helped you or anyone else on your project team...
gain new knowledge or skills.
use new knowledge or skills.
increase understanding of organizational structures and functions.
improve organizational structures and functions.
increase understanding in how to align local, state, and federal policies.
apply knowledge to enact policies.
increase understanding of how to align and use local, state, or federal funds.
apply knowledge to align and use local, state, or federal funds.

The R8CC external evaluator will use responses of “agree” and “strongly agree” on a 5-point response scale (*strongly disagree, disagree, neither disagree nor agree, agree, strongly agree*) to measure the R8CC’s performance on the extent to which recipient outcomes were met. An “*I don’t know*” response option will be added for respondents who may not be able to rate an item, and “*I don’t know*” responses will be excluded from the denominator. As appropriate, based on the project, items will collect information about the extent to which clients gain new knowledge or skills and use new knowledge or skills to carry out the work of the project (*human capacities*); improve understanding of organizational structures and functions and improve organizational structures and functions (*organizational capacities*); improve understanding of how to align or enact policies (federal, state, local) and align or enact policies (federal, state, local) (*policy capacities*); improve understanding of how to secure, align, or use resources (e.g., staffing, funding, facilities, equipment, technology, materials) and secure, align, or use such resources (*resource capacities*). The external evaluator will supplement these items with open-ended questions to ascertain additional details about responses and build a more nuanced understanding of each project’s outcomes. The R8CC goal for GPRA Measure 4, consistent with the guidance provided by ED, is 75% of short-term outcomes met; 80% of clients reporting the extent that short-term outcomes standardized metrics were achieved; and 60% of clients reporting the extent that mid- and long-term standardized metrics were achieved (i.e., indicating a “4” or “5” on a 5-point survey scale).

**Defining and Measuring Progress Toward Outcomes.** The external evaluator will measure and report on the short-, mid-, and long-term outcomes that are in each HLP logic model.

**Short-Term Outcomes.** Short-term outcomes are those outcomes affected by capacity-building services after 1 year. McREL’s external evaluator will measure progress toward the

short-term outcomes on an annual basis primarily through interviews or surveys, and as appropriate, artifacts that provide additional evidence beyond self-reported data. The R8CC operationalizes short-term outcomes for capacity building as an increase in knowledge and skills specific to one or more of the four capacity dimensions (Table 31).

***Mid-Term Outcomes.*** Mid-term outcomes are those outcomes affected by capacity-building services after 2–3 years. Consistent with the ED and R8CC logic models, McREL’s external evaluator will examine progress toward mid-term outcomes annually. Mid-term outcomes are operationalized as the application of knowledge, skills, and understanding in the intended capacity dimension. Outcomes focus on changes in implementation, as well as resources, policies, practices, and systems that support the scaling of capacity at the SEA, REA, TEA, and LEA levels. The measures include a combination of self-reported data gathered through surveys, interviews, observations, and assessments; and a review of artifacts, including communication plans, implementation guides, and policies.

***Long-Term Outcomes.*** Long-term outcomes are those outcomes affected by capacity-building services after 4–5 years. As depicted in the R8CC logic model (Figure 3), the cumulative effects of capacity building that begins with individual skills and knowledge (short-term) that are then applied to practice (mid-term) should ultimately have an impact on educator and student outcomes (long-term). In Year 1, the external evaluator will collect baseline data for all HLP projects’ long-term outcomes and will continue to collect data annually so that progress toward addressing the outcomes is monitored. The external evaluator will report a comprehensive analysis in the final APR.

For project-level measures that are measured via survey, the outcome is considered fully met if at least 80% of respondents agree, partially met if less than 80% but at least 50% of



respondents agree, and not met if fewer than 50% of respondents agree. As part of the AER, McREL’s external evaluator will report whether each outcome is achieved, how performance compares to the goal, and the challenges and barriers that hindered achievement if the goal is not achieved.

### *Making Meaning of the Data and Communicating the Evaluation Findings*

Both the internal and external evaluations will collect, analyze, and report findings from various data sources, such as the HLP teams, clients, and recipients. Data collection, analysis, and the reporting of findings will be done collaboratively in order to honor local context, include local expertise, and ensure reporting is aligned to the interests and accessible to intended audiences.

**Data Analysis.** Descriptive statistics (e.g., frequencies, percentages, measures of central tendency and dispersion) and effect sizes will be calculated and reported as appropriate for quantitative data (i.e., surveys and extant data). The external evaluator will measure progress toward short-term outcomes using surveys or interviews; toward mid-term outcomes using interviews, artifacts, and interim assessments; and toward long-term outcomes predominantly using extant data such as student test scores, graduation rates, and/or dropout rates; educator use of EBPPs; and changes in school improvement designations. The timelines for measuring progress toward outcomes will be set in the annual service plans.

For most qualitative data collected by the external evaluator (e.g., responses to open-ended survey items, responses to interviews and focus groups, observation field notes), the external evaluator will use an inductive approach to identify salient themes and categories, organize the data and identify relationships among themes, draw conclusions, and verify findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

**Communication and Reporting.** In addition to the internal evaluator engaging with HLP teams on a regular basis to support continuous improvement and facilitate dialogue about how data may inform decision-making for the projects, McREL’s external evaluator will also regularly meet with the R8CC leadership and individual project teams to ensure there is a shared understanding of activities in the logic models, project management plans, and intended outcomes. To facilitate ongoing knowledge and understanding of the R8CC’s service delivery and timely formative feedback with respect to the four GPRA measures, the external evaluator will share recommendations with the R8CC team after submitting the APR and AER. Additionally, each year, the external evaluator will lead a debriefing meeting with each R8CC HLP team to review the AER findings using the “Expectations to Change” (E2C) process (Adams et al., 2015). The six-step E2C process provides recipients with the opportunity to collaboratively interpret data and discuss action steps for using the findings and to design the subsequent year’s state service plan.

All evaluation deliverables (i.e., the APR and AER), as well as the data collection methods, protocols, and procedures that inform the deliverables, will be consistent with CCNetwork and ED guidance. Both the external and internal evaluations adhere to the American Evaluation Association’s Guiding Principles for Evaluators (2018) and Program Evaluation Standards (Yarbrough et al., 2010). The evaluators will also follow all required data management and reporting processes (e.g., IRB approval, data retention and destruction) to ensure data are treated ethically and responsibly.

## **Stakeholder Engagement System to Ensure Outreach, Communication, and Involvement Across Organizational Levels and Groups (SC-B2, A-PR4, & A-PR6)**

R8CC leaders, Advisory Board members, and the HLP teams will all serve vital roles in two-way communication and engagement with the SEA, REA, TEA, LEA, and school stakeholders, working closely together to achieve the agreed-upon outcomes, outputs, and milestones in the annual service plans. In the following paragraphs, we describe our system for engaging and communicating with regional clients, recipients, and community members, and for coordinating between the HLP teams and evaluators.

### ***Stakeholder Engagement (A-PR4)***

To provide effective stakeholder engagement, our R8CC team, including communications and outreach staff, will support on-site activities in collaboration with the HLP teams. For example, the state projects will begin with in-person kick-off meetings to build and strengthen relationships and start the collaborative process of developing the project logic model. Our team will invite and encourage engagement with stakeholders who may not be typically consulted in improvement efforts (such as students, families, community members, and school-level educators).

While strong HLP teams with deep expertise were identified to carry out the R8CC work, we recognize the need to cultivate relationships with clients, recipients, and partners who are knowledgeable of the region and the HLP being addressed. We will engage with them, for example, at local and national conferences and meetings, as well as through coordination and collaboration with other federally funded centers.

Our approach also includes an adaptive integration component (Bryk, 2016), in which lessons from site-based work, feedback on services from clients and recipients, and up-to-date



contextual information will be actively discussed during R8CC team meetings and used to inform future activities and communications.

**Ensure Services Reflect Needs.** Needs sensing will be an ongoing process in Region 8 and will include formally collecting and reflecting on feedback from clients and recipients on capacity-building services, products, and needs to help in the creation and updating of the annual service plans and the accompanying communications plan. Our needs sensing will include reviewing social media engagement and webinar feedback as well as supporting the HLP teams in collecting feedback from a variety of stakeholders across the region, ensuring that perspectives of those directly involved in the work, and those who will be affected by the work, are represented.

#### *Comprehensive Communication and Dissemination (A-PR6)*

McREL's relevant corporate experience includes the successful fulfillment of communication functions for current and prior CC grants and REL contracts. We will use our in-depth knowledge of Region 8—the people, the education systems, and their established communications structures—and our existing expertise in communication strategies as the foundation of our R8CC communications system.

The Communications Department at McREL, as a whole, will support R8CC communication and outreach activities, and a communications specialist from the department will be assigned specifically to the R8CC team and its projects. Working closely with R8CC leaders, the HLP teams, and clients, the communications team will create and execute a communications plan for ongoing outreach to clients, recipients, ED, and other stakeholders. The plan will include the purpose, timeline, communication method(s), primary audience, and follow-up activities (if necessary), an approach that aligns with identified influences on knowledge utilization, in which

multiple sources of credible information are disseminated using a “light touch” approach, while deeper knowledge utilization is supported through capacity-building services (Hood, 2002). The R8CC communications team will also meet regularly with the R8CC team and HLP teams to remain continually informed about the region’s communication/engagement needs, update the plan as needed, and provide guidance on stakeholder communication and engagement.

In its communications, the R8CC team, HLP teams, and partners will use a variety of technology platforms to maximize two-way communication and resource sharing, including the R8CC website, SharePoint, Zoom/Teams, Qualtrics, MailChimp, and other technologies as appropriate to ensure continued outreach.

### *Ensure Services Are Delivered in a Relevant and Useful Manner*

Critical to an engaging, robust communications system is also our process for knowledge mobilization to increase the use of research and evidence in decision-making. Knowledge mobilization calls for a move away from siloed, disconnected strategies and toward approaches that value collaboration with and learning from caregivers, communities, teachers, and leaders (NASEM, 2022). In our communications work, we consider how EBPPs are put into action, accounting for specific cultural and contextual applications.

A critical aspect of the proposed communications system is ensuring that materials and services reflect and resonate with local contexts, build stakeholder capacity, and, ultimately, impact educator practice and student achievement. For example, the communications team will help the HLP teams establish communications plans and facilitate communication among clients, recipients, and partners about barriers and facilitators to improvement activities. To support a continuous improvement approach, the communications team will help the HLP teams collect timely feedback from R8CC stakeholders to understand contextual changes, support

implementation of EBPPIs, adjust logic models and planned activities, and monitor progress toward outcomes. We recognize that using various mechanisms (such as listening sessions) is critical to successfully connect with multiple groups (e.g., parent–teacher associations, Native American communities).

**Client Partnership in Dissemination.** Informed by client consultation at the outset of each project, the R8CC communications team will use multiple communication channels and media strategically tailored to the needs of educator, family, and community audiences, delineated below, to effectively capture and disseminate information about EBPPIs and lessons learned. The communication team will also regularly participate in outreach with communication leads from SEAs, REAs, TEAs, LEAs, and other organizations in the region for coordination, feedback, and sharing of R8CC communications. We will work closely with R8CC leadership, the HLP teams, and our clients to ensure all communication products and messaging are of high quality, useful, and aligned with the local context.

**Opportunities for Outreach Activities.** Our communication plan will include outreach to partner organizations on an ongoing basis (at least quarterly) to leverage their networks for dissemination via email distribution lists, social media channels, joint meetings, and presentations at conferences or other events to help increase the cross-promotion of best practices, lessons learned, and PL opportunities. The R8CC communications team will also use local events as key communication vehicles, attending relevant events and presenting information about the HLP work. For example, in Region 8, the annual South Dakota Indian Education Summit draws approximately 400 educators, providing an opportunity for the HLP teams to present their work and expand engagement with interested individuals and groups.



**Cross-TA Center and Cross-Organization Coordination and Collaboration.** We will further expand the R8CC's reach by actively communicating and sharing information with the National CC, REL Central, Equity Assistance Centers (EACs), and other relevant content and TA centers. For example, we will regularly participate in CCNetwork communications group meetings and joint meetings of the CCNetwork and REL Program dissemination groups. Through these meetings, the R8CC communications team plans to coordinate and cross-post relevant information with the CC and REL networks and publish to ED's ERIC database, as well as share and learn from communication best practices used across multiple regions.

**Strategies for Dissemination Through Multiple Formats and Mediums.** We will develop and launch an R8CC website that will include relevant resources, such as HLP project pages, publications, event announcements, and links to other federally funded TA providers, as well as SEA, REA, TEA, and LEA resources from the R8CC's partner agencies. We will ensure the website is optimized for multiple devices in support of the Federal Digital Strategy and Federal Mobility Strategy programs and that it exceeds the technical standards for Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act (29 U.S.C. §798). To monitor and measure stakeholder engagement beyond previously described activities, we will also review data from Google Analytics on website traffic to ensure the website is responsive to local needs. Additionally, we will work closely with National CC communications staff to ensure that the CCNetwork website includes accurate and timely information about the R8CC.

In addition to the website, we will take a multimedia approach to disseminating information and resources, including email newsletters; state-, project-, and audience-specific infoblats; and brief videos to be posted on the website. R8CC staff will create LinkedIn and X (Twitter) accounts to keep stakeholders updated on the Center's work and to allow for real-time interaction

through comments and messaging. R8CC social media accounts will be monitored daily by R8CC staff, who will respond to any questions within 24 hours of receipt. When appropriate and based on stakeholder needs, R8CC staff will also create public SharePoint pages to allow for real-time collaboration and feedback. Additionally, as previously mentioned, we will produce print materials to be distributed at local, in-person community events and meetings for audiences that may not engage with online communications.

Table 33 provides a high-level summary of our proposed R8CC dissemination strategy, including product types and the various audiences and purposes these serve. The communications team will work closely with SEA leaders and key partners to determine which products best serve client needs and intended audiences. The goals in the table are categorized as: (1) *Awareness* (of the CC, of a new topic, of a newly available resource); (2) *Knowledge* (of how the CC works and what resources are available, of the research base, and examples of research application); and (3) *Behavior* (through process outlines and visualizations, discussion items and action steps, and exemplars with reflection opportunities).

**Table 33. Summary of Proposed Dissemination Products**

Product Type	Audience	Goal(s)	Frequency
<b>Brochures and Handouts</b> (print and digital) <i>R8CC and state HLP overviews, project updates, and topic introductions</i>	State client, potential partners, policymakers	Awareness	Ongoing
<b>Blog Posts</b> <i>Project updates and introductions to various topics</i>	State client, potential partners, practitioners, policymakers, general public	Awareness, Knowledge	Ongoing
<b>Impact Stories</b> (print and digital) <i>Highlight effective practices and the R8CC's use and dissemination of EBPPs</i>	State client, potential partners, practitioners, policymakers, general public	Awareness, Knowledge	Following project milestone accomplishments
<b>Infographics</b> (print and digital) <i>Resource that highlights the EBPPs on a particular topic or process</i>	State client, potential partners, practitioners, other interested parties	Awareness, Knowledge, Behavior	Ongoing
<b>Webinars</b> <i>Share information about HLP opportunities, progress, and content, highlighting partner voices to a broad stakeholder audience</i>	State client, potential partners, practitioners, policymakers, general public	Awareness, Knowledge, Behavior	Ongoing
<b>Newsletters</b> <i>Updates in the region, introductions to staff and partners, and highlighting new products</i>	State client, potential partners, practitioners, policymakers, general public	Awareness, Knowledge, Behavior	Every Trimester



<b>Social Media</b> <i>Maintain online presence on X and LinkedIn, especially to share resources</i>	State client, potential partners, policymakers, general public	Awareness	Ongoing
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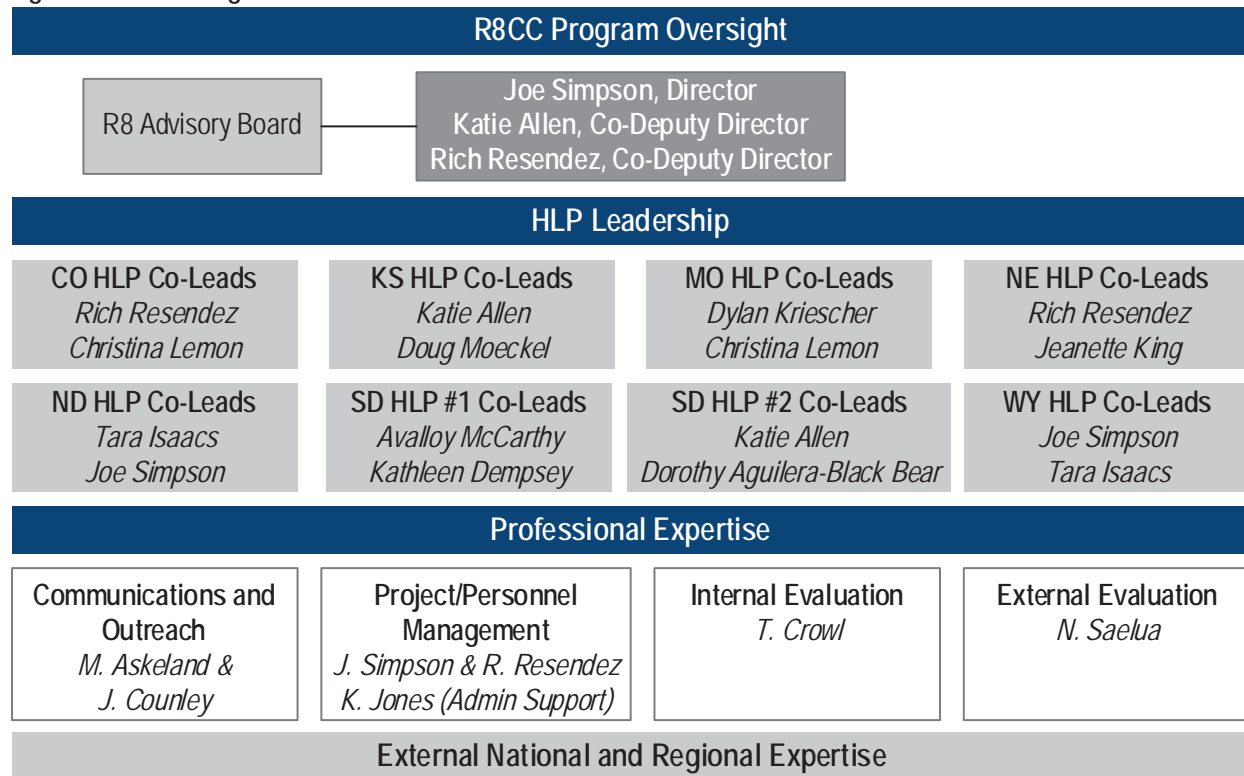
**Dissemination Considerations in the Central Region.** The R8CC communications team will work closely with the HLP teams to ensure that all communication products and messaging are contextually appropriate, useful, and of high quality. Many communities within Region 8 are in rural areas and value local control. Therefore, we will customize dissemination strategies based on stakeholder needs to build capacity, honor processes, leverage existing communication channels, and support knowledge mobilization. For example, in South Dakota, when working with Native American communities, our resources will use asset-focused terminology and visuals that reflect the community to honor their local context. In addition, dissemination strategies will acknowledge the travel and weather challenges that can arise in the area. For example, virtual meetings and events are more accessible in the winter for many participants, and posting resources and products online can simplify sharing to a wider audience.

### **Personnel Management System (SC-B3, A-PR5)**

Recognizing the importance of assembling the best team, we have designed the R8CC personnel management system to ensure R8CC staff provide high quality, relevant, and useful capacity-building services to SEAs, REAs, TEAs, LEAs, and schools in a timely and cost-efficient manner. We identified our R8CC staff and subcontracting organizations based on their professional (e.g., organizational development, communications and outreach, and program evaluation) and content expertise (e.g., educator workforce, literacy, and student wellness), as well as their knowledge of the R8CC state contexts, including their rurality, emphasis on local control, and the diverse student populations residing in the region (see Figure 15). The following sections describe the **three core processes of our personnel management system: hiring, development and supervision, and transitions.**



Figure 15. R8CC Organizational Chart



AIR, AEM Corporation, Child Trends, Community Training and Assistance Center (CTAC), Mathematica, as well as federally funded TA centers and EACs

### *Hiring Processes*

As the lead organization for the R8CC, McREL understands that the quality and experience of professional staff influence the outcomes and thus has a rigorous hiring process that focuses on identifying candidates who bring diverse backgrounds in education, through the lens of both skillset and culture. After screening each prospective McREL employee for basic experience and education requirements, those who advance in the process may engage in each of the following phases: (1) a values screen to assess the candidate's alignment with McREL's organizational values and their ability to meet the basic needs of the role; (2) an assessment tailored to the skills required for the role, such as a writing sample, data analysis exercise, or presentation; and (3) an interview with a panel of current McREL employees to delve deeper into the candidate's experience and skillset. Additional interviews are also conducted depending on the position. The

final selection is based on the results of these steps as well as considerations of the team's and organization's immediate and long-term needs. Once McREL makes an offer and it is accepted, the McREL People and Culture team directly supports the new hire in preparation for their first day of employment.

R8CC leaders will manage the hiring and contracting of subject-matter and technical experts and organizations for services to support implementation of the annual service plans. Though not anticipated, contracts for services at or above the simplified acquisition threshold (SAT) will be procured through a public, competitive procurement process. Services for scopes of work less than the SAT will be procured through small purchase procedures and a request for quote from the R8CC's pool of five subcontracting organizations. In all cases, whether above or below the SAT, contracts will be awarded to the subcontractor(s) whose quote(s) best supports the scope of work, with price and other factors (e.g., qualifications and ability to provide specialized services) considered.

### *Development and Supervision Processes*

New McREL employees begin engaging in development and supervision processes on their first day of employment with the assignment of a coach to guide their onboarding, professional growth, and to help them provide exemplary service to our clients. Coaches engage in regular development conversations with employees, not only overseeing typical supervisory tasks (e.g., approving timesheets) but also facilitating ongoing growth, skill enhancement, and access to PL opportunities. Quarterly growth conversations and annual performance reviews ensure that employees engage in ongoing reflection of their growth, identify opportunities for improvement, and set goals for the coming year.

The R8CC director and deputy directors will support the development and supervision of the HLP co-leads and subcontractors implementing the annual service plans. The R8CC director will use individual, bi-monthly check-in meetings with the deputy directors and HLP co-leads to support their growth and development in effectively managing the R8CC's processes, systems, and federal reporting, and in leading the HLP teams to provide high-quality TA to achieve recipient outcomes and meet both the client and CC Program goals.

Monthly project review meetings to check on progress with service plan implementation for each HLP will include R8CC leaders, HLP co-leads, the internal evaluator, and communications personnel. In addition to discussing HLP progress and achievements, the standard meeting agenda will include reporting on challenges and constraints, with problem-solving as needed; reviews of evidence for project milestones and outputs and progress toward outcomes facilitated by our internal evaluator; reporting of ongoing needs sensing; and reminders of deadlines or due dates for project reporting.

To help ensure development of the full R8CC team, monthly team meetings will be held to share successes, challenges, and lessons learned across all HLP teams and projects; share and discuss use of resources and information from the National CC, Content Centers, and CC Program office that may improve the R8CC's capacity-building services; or share and discuss how the work benefits Region 8 clients, recipients, or other interested parties. R8CC leaders and team members will participate in learning opportunities offered through the National and Content Centers and any CCNetwork meetings, as appropriate.

### *Transitions*

As with all organizations, transitions among staff are to be expected, whether voluntary or involuntary. McREL views any transition as an opportunity to receive feedback from departing



staff about their experiences at McREL and factors that influenced their decision to leave. To facilitate this opportunity, McREL conducts exit interviews with staff members transitioning from the organization and uses information from these interviews to inform institutional and program improvements.

R8CC leaders must also have protocols and procedures to address staff transitions among R8CC key personnel and our clients. As previously described, the R8CC will utilize a co-lead structure for each HLP to ensure project stability and maintain progress in case of unforeseen circumstances or transitions of one lead. Similarly, the leadership structure for the R8CC with a director and two deputy directors will ensure continuity of experienced leadership for the Center should transitions in personnel occur. Per its cooperative agreement with ED to operate the R8CC, McREL will notify and obtain approval from the program officer for any changes in key R8CC personnel.

To mitigate transitions for any newly elected/appointed CSSOs, their designees, or clients who are engaged in HLP service plan implementation, the R8CC will build a broad base of SEA and stakeholder involvement with project activities so familiarity and commitment for each project persists among multiple staff. We will engage with new state leaders in a timely manner to communicate project activities and successes, while also being attentive to each new leaders' priorities. The HLP co-leads will schedule regular meetings with the SEAs and their partners to develop a culture of collaboration and communication. We will also maintain project records, such as project status logs, in a shared location (i.e., the R8CC SharePoint site), ensuring all project clients, HLP team members, and partners have access to the information. Maintaining continuous two-way communication with project clients and recipients will sustain momentum for project activities and ease staff transitions, whether these arise within the SEA or the R8CC.

### *Retaining Subject-Matter and Technical Experts*

To retain the most qualified subject-matter and TA experts, McREL assembled a comprehensive pool of five subcontracting organizations with lengthy histories and success in providing capacity-building services to SEAs, REAs, TEAs, LEAs, and schools. This pool will facilitate the R8CC's nimble access to deep expertise across a wide range of existing and emerging priority areas and topics (see Developed and Ongoing Partnerships with Leading Technical Experts section, p. 128). Moreover, our competitive bid process to procure services from these organizations will help to maximize the use of federal funds and resources throughout the 5-year CC cooperative agreement.

### *HLP Teams*

As mentioned, two co-leads will lead each HLP team (both at 30% full-time equivalent [FTE] and shown in the organizational chart, Figure 15). The HLP co-leads have overlapping subject-matter expertise, knowledge about state-level context and needs, and experience providing capacity-building services and TA under multiple CC program cycles. They will work together to build relationships with clients and recipients, and will implement the annual service plans with support of the full HLP team. This model enhances our ability to embed a co-lead within each state and ensure continuity of services throughout the 5-year program, even during times of unplanned staff transitions. The co-leads will provide leadership over the design and implementation of all capacity-building services in support of each state's overall project goals and objectives, collaborating with R8CC leaders on translating state needs into feasible and effective annual service plans and designing and implementing capacity-building services with recipients. The HLP co-leads will also ensure that R8CC products (e.g., meeting materials) and deliverables (e.g., annual service plans) are consistent with ED's requirements and expectations

and are responsive to reviewer feedback. All proposed co-leads have experience in the six-phase CIP, working with recipients based on their level of readiness, and facilitating data teams and decision-making groups. Additionally, the co-leads will work closely with the HLP teams to coordinate project activities, collect and archive fidelity data and use of EBPPs, and collaborate with the evaluators. The HLP leads will be the on-the-ground persons best situated to facilitate ongoing needs sensing and identify emergent needs.

The HLP teams were selected based on their knowledge and experience with the HLP and our capacity-building approach. Depending on the needs of each HLP team, expertise from our pool of national and regional experts, or experts available through collaboration with REL Central, the Midwest and Plains and Western Educational EACs, and other federally funded TA centers (e.g., the National CC and Content Centers), as well as local businesses and organizations, may be included. Organizations providing subject-matter or technical expertise may be asked to respond to a competitive bidding process to facilitate coordination, help ensure the highest quality services, and maximize use of federal funds.

### *Advisory Board*

The Advisory Board will serve a vital role in the two-way communication process for the R8CC. It will consist of the seven CSSOs or their designees, along with not more than 15 other members who are representative of the educational interests in the region, and may include representatives from IHEs, REAs, TEAs, LEAs (from both rural and urban areas), parents, practicing educators, policymakers, businesses, researchers, and other expert practitioners. CSSOs/designees will serve on the Advisory Board for the duration of the R8CC cooperative agreement. In October 2024, the R8CC director will consult with these state education leaders to identify Advisory Board members from each state based on their relevant expertise and local

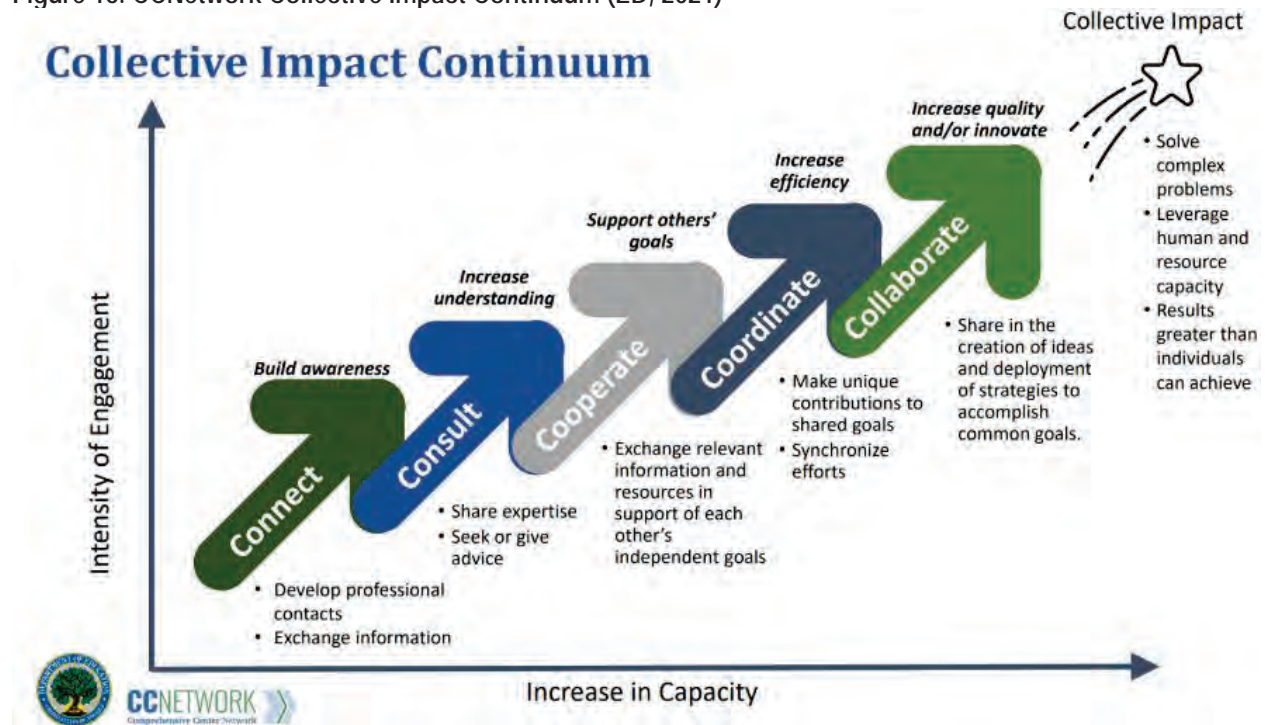


knowledge. The Advisory Board members from each state will meet mid-year via virtual meetings to review their state's HLP progress and provide feedback to guide implementation. An annual in-person Advisory Board meeting will be held for members to discuss the annual service plans, engage in needs sensing, review progress on the state HLPs, solicit feedback to guide implementation, discuss lessons learned, and advise on next step activities.

### **Collaborating with Partners to Maximize Effectiveness of Services (SC-B4, R-PR4, A-PR7, & A-PR8)**

The regional CCs are charged with building capacity to implement EBPPs through a continuous improvement process. We recognize the important role of partners in helping us fulfill this mission. For example, RELs are responsible for identifying EBPPs, EACs help ensure supports are provided to groups with the greatest need, and Content Centers provide targeted supports to groups on a given topic. We also recognize that collaborating with partners such as these requires a different approach—one that is attentive to each organization's goals, timelines, and processes. Our approach to collaboration recognizes that partner relationships follow a continuum of intensity and corresponding changes in capacity (ED, 2021; see Figure 16). We approach potential partners to connect and build awareness of each other's mission and goals. If appropriate, we then enter into partnership agreements that support deeper engagement in the continuum, from consultation, seeking advice and sharing learnings; to cooperation, supporting each other's individual goals; to coordination, where we plan unique contributions to shared goals; and to collaboration, where we partner to accomplish common goals. To realize this potential, we will engage with partner organizations—including those identified in this proposal—along this continuum, with the goal of helping our clients achieve outcomes not possible to achieve in isolation.

Figure 16. CCNetwork Collective Impact Continuum (ED, 2021)



### Participation with the National Evaluation of the CC Program (A-PR9)

The R8CC is committed to continuous improvement and accountability. As such, our staff will participate in all aspects of the national CC evaluation in cooperation with ED and its external evaluator(s). This includes responding to surveys and requests to participate in interviews, focus groups, or other data collection methods. R8CC will promptly share all requested documents and information related to R8CC capacity-building services, including state HLP logic models, project management plans, and annual service plans that describe the R8CC's scope of capacity-building services and TA work in the Central Region.

## The R8CC's Subject-Matter and Technical Assistance (TA) Expertise (SC-C)

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In addition to the deep professional and content expertise reflected on the HLP teams, McREL brings extensive organizational, subject-matter, and TA expertise to the proposed R8CC. McREL has a long history of providing high-quality capacity-building services to SEAs, REAs, TEAs, LEAs, and schools, particularly in the Region 8 states. Following a description of our organizational experience, we summarize the relevant knowledge, understanding, and experience of the proposed R8CC team.

### McREL's Organizational Experience (SC-C2 & A-AR4)

McREL has developed a long history of successfully working on large federal projects and delivering extensive subject-matter and technical expertise and assistance to build capacity to implement, support, scale up, and sustain the use of EBPPs in education agencies. As such, our staff have a wealth of experience conducting comprehensive needs assessments, developing logic models, planning for and supporting the implementation of EBPPs, and monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of interventions. We also have a long history of supporting educators through coaching, PL, and other continuous improvement efforts. Below, we highlight a few examples of the work we have done in Region 8 and through other federal contracts.

McREL's R12CC project, *Using Place-Based Decision Making to Strengthen the Colorado Educator Workforce Pipeline*, a partnership with CDE and REL Central, began with the development of a geographic information system map that helps education leaders to better understand factors influencing educator shortage challenges. **Co-designed with CDE**, and refined through iterative cycles of feedback and needs sensing with Colorado REAs, LEAs, and educator preparation program staff, the map produces **clear and relevant data displays** for users at a time when teacher shortages across the state are increasing. Reflecting on the need to



diversify the Colorado educator workforce, CDE’s director of research and impact stated, “This allows our [users] to look at districts across the state and ... pinpoint areas ... where we have high levels of students of color and low levels of educators of color” (R12CC, 2022). As the R12CC cooperative agreement comes to a close, McREL has ensured **CDE is equipped and prepared to independently sustain the map** into the future by building capacity among staff in CDE’s Office of Research and Impact to update the map as new data become available, and according to a plan and timeline collaboratively developed with office leadership.

In response to the rapidly changing context of delivering education during COVID-19, McREL launched a monthly forum to engage school superintendents in conversations about leading change during times of uncertainty. Developed initially for Kansas, the **timely and useful** forum, framed around **relevant problems of practice** that emerged during the pandemic was so well-received that R12CC launched a second forum to support Missouri superintendents to strengthen instructional practice and student learning. Continuing to this day, and based on **ongoing needs sensing and feedback from participants**, the monthly sessions have evolved over time. For example, a four-part series focused on developing teacher talent included staff members from participating superintendents’ districts who had responsibilities related to curriculum and instruction and PL. In a recent **assessment of effectiveness and impact**, 94% of respondents agreed that they had increased their understanding or knowledge of the issues discussed, with a majority reporting that they applied what was discussed to challenges in their district (90%) and shared information from the forum with others (87%).

In Nebraska, McREL’s intensive services with the NDE included building the capacity of a cohort of educators to implement evidence-based instructional practices associated with improving academic outcomes for ELs. Supports included creating nine instructional modules

which cohort members then shared with thousands of educators to build statewide instructional capacity to serve ELs. This cohort has become **a self-sustaining entity** that now regularly contributes to Nebraska education policy and standards development.

In South Dakota, the legislature recognized that Native American students were not making the same academic progress as other students and convened a council of Native American education and Tribal leaders (i.e., the Native American Student Achievement Advisory Council [NASAAC]) to offer recommendations for improvement. McREL staff provided support in various ways, including assisting the NASAAC with meeting facilitation and drafting a report for the state legislature. The NASAAC's recommendations were considered by legislators and **resulted in legislation** allowing up to three schools to apply for funding to implement a school redesign initiative aligned to the recommendations in the report.

McREL helped the WDE develop their 2017–2021 Digital Learning Plan. This service included facilitation of the Digital Learning Plan Advisory Panel, a group consisting of representatives from business, industry, higher education, community, and education stakeholders; facilitation of **needs sensing via a 12-stop statewide listening tour**; development and administration of district surveys and focus groups; and state assistance with drafting the plan and identifying communication processes to keep constituents up to date throughout the process.

For the past 12 years, McREL has delivered high-quality applied research, training, coaching, and TA services to a wide range of stakeholders through the REL Pacific. In its most recent Contractor Performance Assessment Report, McREL received “Exceptional” ratings in areas of Quality, Schedule, and Management. ED's contract officer assessing performance noted that the products created by REL Pacific demonstrated “a thoughtful understanding of the needs of

regional stakeholders, and the work ... is consistently high leverage” and that “dissemination activities ... have been creative and engaging, elevating the work of the REL Program.”

### **Quality of Proposed Project Personnel from McREL (SC-C1, R-PR8, & R-AR2)**

Our proposed R8CC team includes leaders and key personnel who reside in states across the region, bringing deep knowledge of the educational and political context, the challenges that exist in each state, and strong relationships with stakeholders that are necessary to collaboratively solve the HLPs. Collectively, they represent more than 100 years of experience leading state and local education systems, conducting research, facilitating capacity building, and improving educational outcomes for all students (see Appendix A, Resumes). In addition, the team brings deep knowledge of federal programs, ESSA legislation and requirements—as well as a unique set of insights about how to guide systemic improvement efforts from the top down and bottom up.

### ***R8CC Project Director and Deputy Directors***

**Joe Simpson, Ed.S.**, R8CC Project Director (75% FTE) based in Cheyenne, Wyoming, will lead the Center’s team and serve as the HLP Co-Lead for North Dakota and Wyoming. In his role as Director, Mr. Simpson will be responsible and accountable for all aspects of the Center’s operation, serving as the primary point-of-contact with ED and the region’s seven CSSOs/designees. He will lead monthly meetings with R8CC staff and partners to discuss national, state, and regional updates and manage communication and dissemination activities in coordination with the communications team. Mr. Simpson will also work with McREL leaders and its Business Services office, the R8CC deputy directors, and the evaluation team to ensure timely, effective, and cost-efficient delivery of services.



Currently, Mr. Simpson serves as a Co-Director for the R11CC where he assists in the coordination, development, and oversight of a portfolio of project and annual work plans for the SEAs and LEAs in Nebraska, North and South Dakota, and Wyoming. He also serves as a state project lead and provides support to the other state project leads who deliver high-quality capacity-building services and TA to help solve the states' HLPs.

With service at the local, state, and national levels, he has a vast professional network and a deep understanding of the challenges affecting rural education. He has served as a special education teacher, Title I director, and high school principal. In fact, Kelly Walsh High School earned the first Outcomes Accreditation from the North Central Accreditation Association while he was principal.

Additionally, Mr. Simpson served as deputy state superintendent of public instruction for the WDE under two elected state superintendents for 13 years. During his time, he oversaw a \$1.5B budget and programs implemented by 150 colleagues. Mr. Simpson was also the public education liaison to the Tribal Government on the Wind River Reservation and worked with the joint Tribal council, community agencies, and all Fremont County school districts to improve Native American students' school attendance and literacy skills. During his tenure, the Wyoming Native Education Conference was started. Mr. Simpson also worked with the governor's office, state superintendent, and legislators to develop and implement a new public education finance system, and to get appropriations passed to connect rural communities to high-speed internet.

After working as deputy state superintendent, Mr. Simpson served as the deputy executive director for the Division of Leadership and Professional Development with the Council of Chief State School Officers in Washington, D.C. He helped update the national Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards for principals, which describe what all school

leaders, regardless of grade level or context, can do to strengthen organizations, support teachers, lead instruction, and advance student learning.

Mr. Simpson earned his Ed.S. in Educational Leadership and Organizational Development from the University of Wyoming and an M.Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis on microcomputer technology from Lesley College in Cambridge, M.A. He also has a B.S. in Special Education (K–12) and Elementary Education from Montana State University.

**Katie Allen, Ed.D.**, R8CC Co-Deputy Director (60% FTE) based in Manhattan, Kansas, will serve as part of the Center’s leadership team and the HLP Co-Lead in Kansas and for the SDDTR project in South Dakota. As a Co-Deputy Director, she will be responsible for providing strategic leadership, mentoring and leading staff, building relationships with clients, and managing all aspects of projects, including timelines and budgets. As a Co-Lead, Dr. Allen will provide capacity-building services in Kansas and with the SDDTR, working with educators and SEA, TEA, and LEA staff to assess needs and support school improvement efforts in areas such as executive leadership and participatory processes that engage stakeholders in addressing gaps to improve Native American student outcomes.

In her role as the Kansas and SDDTR Co-Lead, Dr. Allen brings a wealth of educational technical expertise. She will contribute to these HLP teams by aligning education support services with Dr. Doug Moeckel in Kansas and Dr. Dorothy Aguilera-Black Bear in South Dakota. Finally, Dr. Allen will draw from her extensive experience as an educational TA leader to help facilitate meetings.

Dr. Allen is an associate program director at McREL and currently co-directs the R12CC with Dr. Resendez and serves as Co-Lead for Kansas, supporting the provision of high-quality TA to SEAs, LEAs, and other stakeholders centered on school accreditation and executive

leadership development. Prior to joining McREL, Allen spent 7 years working in a university-based research and evaluation center where she led planning and evaluation for a variety of projects focused on improving outcomes for K–12 students and teacher preparation. Dr. Allen serves as member of the Manhattan-Ogden, Kansas school board and is a Graduate Faculty Associate in the Department of Educational Leadership at Kansas State University's College of Education. She has over a decade of experience leading community partnerships with schools to improve outcomes in the areas of early childhood and positive youth behavior. Allen earned her M.P.A. and doctorate in educational leadership from Kansas State University, has a bachelor's degree in history from the University of Kansas, and is also certified by IES in the WWC Group Design Standards.

**Richard Resendez, Ph.D.**, R8CC Co-Deputy Director (60% FTE) based in Denver, Colorado, will also serve as part of the Center's leadership team, contributing to the development of project logic models, formative evaluation, communications, and QA processes. As Co-Deputy Director, he will be responsible for providing strategic leadership, mentoring and leading staff, building relationships with clients, and managing all aspects of the projects, including timelines and budgets. In addition to his responsibilities within the organization, he will lead capacity-building projects, working with educators and SEA and LEA staff to assess needs and support school improvement efforts in areas such as literacy development and instruction, graduation pathways, and educational leadership.

As the proposed R8CC Co-Lead for the Colorado and Nebraska HLP teams and projects, Dr. Resendez brings a wealth of experience and expertise in education to this role. His background in personalized and individualized learning will help him contribute to Colorado's HLP with Dr. Christina Lemon. His strong content knowledge of literacy and literacy instruction



will help him collaborate on Nebraska's HLP with Dr. King. Finally, Dr. Resendez will draw from his extensive experience as a teacher, school leader, literacy researcher, and district leader.

Currently, Dr. Resendez is an associate program director at McREL and serves as Co-Director for the R12CC, supporting the provision of high-quality TA to SEAs, LEAs, and other stakeholders to solve HLPs for education professionals and the students they serve. He has over 25 years of experience in early childhood through higher education. Prior to joining McREL, he worked as a teacher, school leader, school consultant, education researcher, and most recently as the Manager of Tiered Support Schools in Denver Public Schools. His domestic and international education experience focused heavily on school improvement initiatives, education innovation, and literacy development and instruction. He attended Michigan State University for his Ph.D. in Education Policy, and the University of Michigan for his M.A. in Education Foundations and Policy and B.A. in History.

### *Key Center Personnel*

**Christina Lemon, Ed.D.**, will serve as the Colorado and Missouri HLP Co-Lead (60% FTE). As a co-lead, Dr. Lemon will contribute her expertise in personalized, inquiry-based, and competency-based learning to help improve early literacy outcomes in Missouri and she will leverage her expertise in secondary education and learning pathways to help guide the HLP team to develop and strengthen pathways to postsecondary for all students in Colorado. As a consultant at McREL, she currently serves as the R12CC's co-lead for Colorado, supporting the provision of high-quality TA to SEAs, LEAs, and other stakeholders to address dropout prevention and student re-engagement, and to strengthen and diversify the educator workforce pipeline in the state.

Prior to joining McREL, she supported Colorado K–12 students and educators as a classroom teacher, instructional coach, PL instructor, and building leader. In these roles, she provided leadership to build education practices that serve all students, especially in the areas of personalized, inquiry-based, and competency-based learning. Dr. Lemon earned a B.A. in Social Sciences, an M.A. in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment from Regis University, and an M.Ed. and Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from the American College of Education.

**Dylan Kriescher, Ph.D.**, will serve as the Missouri HLP Co-Lead (30% FTE). As a co-lead, Dr. Kriescher will use their expertise in research design and formative assessment to help Missouri further address their literacy formative assessment HLP. As a McREL researcher, they support research, evaluation, and TA of local, state, and federal entities. This support includes co-designing the facilitation and development of a systemwide formative assessment implementation plan for the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Public School System with the REL Pacific. They also support Kansas' school improvement plans through developmental evaluation and assistance of the KSDE's registered teacher apprenticeship program and the Kansas Education Systems Accreditation process with the R12CC.

Prior to joining McREL, Dr. Kriescher taught postsecondary courses in educational psychology foundations of learning and development. They also served as a researcher at the University of Northern Colorado where their primary research focus was on learner motivation, self-efficacy, and classroom assessment, exploring how student beliefs about the learning process are supported by assessment practices. Dr. Kriescher earned a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology from the University of Northern Colorado and an M.S. in Experimental Psychology from Indiana State University.

**Doug Moeckel, Ed.D.**, Deputy Executive Director of KASB and based in Topeka, will serve as the Kansas HLP Co-Lead (30% FTE). In his role, Dr. Moeckel will use his expertise in educational executive leadership, adult training, and school leadership to help Kansas address its HLP. Currently, Dr. Moeckel serves as a Kansas co-lead for the R12CC. Through KASB, he works with all 285 districts in the state, conducting superintendent searches and working with school boards, superintendents, and building-level principals through KASB's Leadership Services program, which develops leadership capacity at all LEA levels. He also serves on multiple KSDE committees and advisory boards, including the Kansas Redesign School Selection Committee and KSDE Redesign Advisory Committee.

He has led PL in the Kansans Can School Redesign Project, "Mercury" and "Gemini I and II" schools, supporting district leadership teams in planning systemic change and developing community engagement to support student success. Dr. Moeckel has been a Kansas secondary school teacher, school principal, and district superintendent. Specifically, he served as principal of Ellsworth High School and as superintendent of the Ellsworth Unified School District 327 for 5 years. He holds a B.S. in Science from Kansas State University; M. S. in Physical Education from Fort Hays State University, and an Ed.D. in Educational Administration from Kansas State University.

**Jeanette King, Ph.D.**, will serve as the Nebraska HLP Co-Lead (30% FTE) and will use her expertise in literacy, high-quality instruction, and equity to help Nebraska address its HLP. As a senior researcher at McREL, she has experience in both classroom practice and research on the alignment of high-quality instruction and assessment to policy goals. With over 25 years of educational experience working with districts, state agencies, and universities, she brings a



wealth of expertise. Dr. King's recent project explored the alignment of instruction to new standards. She also led projects for the R11CC with partners in Nebraska and Wyoming.

Prior to joining McREL, she conducted research and evaluation focused on equity of access to high-quality tasks for all learners. Dr. King has presented her work at many national conferences including those of the American Educational Research Association, American Evaluation Association, and American Psychological Association, and internationally for the European Association for Research in Learning and Instruction. In addition to program evaluation, Dr. King has more than 15 years of experience in kindergarten through postsecondary instruction, special education services, and language/learning evaluation. She supported research projects focused on educator effectiveness and inclusive education models. Dr. King received a B.A. from The George Washington University; master's degrees from the University of Vermont, Bank Street College of Education, and Rutgers University; and a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology from Rutgers University.

**Tara Isaacs, Ed.D.**, will serve as the North Dakota and Wyoming HLP Co-Lead (60% FTE) in collaboration with proposed R8CC Director Simpson. As a co-lead, Dr. Isaacs will contribute her expertise in educational leadership and PL to help both North Dakota and Wyoming address their HLPs focused on improving teacher working conditions and strengthening SEA systems to support district and school improvement. As McREL's Executive Director of Learning Services, she tailors and customizes services through a data- and strengths-based approach to drive impactful change while employing a practitioner and researcher lens.

Prior to joining McREL, Dr. Isaacs focused on enhancing educator practices, student outcomes, fostering collective self-efficacy, strategic planning, and personalizing high-quality PL within large education agencies. She also excelled in prior roles, including serving as a

classroom teacher, district language arts/literacy specialist, adjunct professor, and consultant.

Dr. Isaacs holds a B.A. in Sociology; minor in Elementary Education, and an M.S. in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Tennessee, an M.A. in Education Administration and an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies from Eastern Kentucky University, along with active K–12 Principal, Instructional Supervisor, and Superintendent certifications.

**Avalloy McCarthy, Ph.D.**, will serve as the SDDOE HLP Co-Lead (30% FTE) in collaboration with Ms. Kathleen Dempsey. As a mathematics expert, Dr. McCarthy will contribute her expertise in high-quality mathematics instruction and mathematics teacher training to help the SDDOE address its mathematics HLP. As a researcher at McREL, she contributes to research and evaluation projects by collecting data, conducting analyses, and producing reports and presentations.

Before joining McREL, she spent 12 years teaching in higher education, preparing student-teachers to teach mathematics in the K–12 sector. Dr. McCarthy served 6 years on the mathematics board at The University of Technology, Jamaica, where she helped to strengthen and update their mathematics programs. She also founded the *Tomorrow's World* intervention, which identifies where children struggle with mathematics and utilizes appropriate teaching approaches to address areas of concern. Dr. McCarthy's research focused on improving the preparation of teachers of mathematics and mathematics teaching and learning. Dr. McCarthy earned a B.Ed. in Mathematics Education at Shortwood Teacher's College, an M.Ed. in Mathematics Education from The University of the West Indies, and a Ph.D. in Mathematics Education from the University of the West Indies.

**Kathleen Dempsey, M.Ed.**, will serve as the SDDOE HLP Co-Lead (30% FTE) alongside Dr. McCarthy. As a co-lead, Ms. Dempsey will use her expertise in high-quality mathematics

instruction, math curriculum design, instructional leadership, and school improvement to help the state address the SDDOE's mathematics HLP. Previously, Ms. Dempsey served as Director of the North Central CC, building the capacity of Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming to implement state-level initiatives and support district- and school-level initiatives that improve student outcomes, close achievement gaps, and improve the quality of instruction. Ms. Dempsey has K–12 education experience as a practitioner, district leader, consultant, and researcher for over 40 years. With a focus on mathematics education, she conducted alignment studies, helped SEAs develop standards, coordinated improvement initiatives, and facilitated PL nationally and internationally. Her years of teaching and leading secondary mathematics programs and experience implementing formative assessment practices built the foundation for formal research.

From 2011–2015, she served as a co-principal investigator (co-PI) on a Goal 2 grant funded by IES entitled, *Learning to Use Formative Assessment in Mathematics with the Assessment Work Sample Method (AWSM)*, and as a task lead on a Task 2 IES grant studying the efficacy of a pre-Algebra supplemental program. Dempsey is co-author of *Common Core Standards for High School Mathematics: A Quick Start Guide* and *Common Core Standards for Middle School Mathematics: A Quick Start Guide* published with ASCD. She holds an M.A. in Educational Supervision from The College of William and Mary, and a B.S. in Elementary Education – Grades 4–7 from Old Dominion University.

**Dorothy Aguilera-Black Bear, Ph.D.**, will serve as the SDDTR Co-Lead (30% FTE) in collaboration with Dr. Allen. As a co-lead based in South Dakota, Dr. Aguilera-Black Bear will contribute her expertise in Indigenous communities, Indigenous language, leadership, and culturally relevant pedagogies to provide guidance for the SDDTR's HLP focused on



Native American students. Dr. Aguilera-Black Bear has Choctaw, French, and Dutch heritage, and is the State Lead for the South Dakota Bright Spots Project for the R11CC. She has over 25 years of experience in research design and methods, policy analysis, and program evaluation, which she has used in a variety of public and private nonprofit sectors. She was a PI on 30 projects identifying and implementing EBPPs in PreK–12 schools and IHE and workforce development programming serving Native American populations. Recently, she also led the evaluation team for the SDDOE’s Native American Achievement Schools project that Indigenized two public schools, co-led a pilot school study with teachers implementing Indigenous curriculum, and a literacy study documenting educators experiences with the science of reading approach and coursework. She has published on Indigenous communities, language, leadership, and culturally relevant pedagogies. Dr. Aguilera-Black Bear holds a master’s in foundations of multicultural and bilingual education and a doctorate degree in educational foundations in policy and practice from the University of Colorado at Boulder.

**Michelle Askeland, B.A.,** will lead communication activities for the R8CC (35% FTE). Ms. Askeland currently leads communication services for the R11CC and will, under the proposed R8CC, coordinate with the communications departments at each Region 8 SEA to align services, gain approval for media releases, manage social media activities, and promote two-way communication with education stakeholders in the region. As a McREL communications specialist, she researches, edits, and writes for a variety of McREL publications; supports marketing efforts; and develops internal and external communications. Ms. Askeland also manages content and design for McREL’s websites, writes and edits the monthly *McREL Changing Schools e-Newsletter*, and produces and manages content for McREL’s social media channels and the McREL blog. Additionally, she provides writing and editorial assistance for

client-focused projects, including policy, standards, and curriculum reviews; newsletters; research studies; proposals; and grant projects. Before joining McREL, Ms. Askeland was an editor and journalist for two business-to-business publications, one covering public-safety radio technologies and one covering Colorado commercial real estate. She earned a B.A. in Technical Journalism from Colorado State University.

**Tracie Crowl, M.A.**, will serve as the internal evaluator for the R8CC (25% FTE). In this role, Ms. Crowl will assist the HLP teams with continuous improvement processes; for example, developing and administering stakeholder surveys for formative feedback, developing interview protocols and conducting interviews with internal staff and clients, analyzing qualitative and quantitative data, and creating user-friendly data displays.

As a research associate at McREL, Ms. Crowl provides research and evaluation support for contracts and grants. She returned to McREL from the City and County of Denver’s Department of Human Services, where she worked as the senior program evaluator for the Division of Child Welfare and Adult Protective Services’ program evaluation and development team. Prior to that, Ms. Crowl spent 3 years at McREL, as a research associate and as a consultant, where she contributed to the R11CC and R12CC projects. She earned a B.A. in Human Development from Metropolitan State University of Denver and an M.A. in Education and Human Development from University of Colorado–Denver.

*Our Knowledge of Statutory Requirements, Regulations, and Policies Related to ESEA/ESSA and Current Education Issues and Policy Initiatives (A-AR 3)*

McREL’s proposed R8CC team understands local, state, and federal policies, as well as the pressing educational issues and policy initiatives that are affecting the SEAs, LEAs, and schools we support. Our extensive experience includes providing intensive capacity-building services

and TA to SEAs in alignment with and support of federal statutory requirements, regulations, and policies. This support has spanned multiple iterations of the ESEA and aided SEAs in the transition from one legislation to another (e.g., No Child Left Behind [NCLB] to ESSA). For example, proposed staff served as thought partners to help draft ESSA plans and facilitate Tribal consultation and stakeholder engagement to inform plan development. In 2022 and 2023, the R12CC supported CDE in their goal of ensuring all Colorado school districts demonstrate compliance with all federal and state program requirements. Current R12CC staff reviewed and provided feedback on a self-monitoring assessment that supported LEA efforts to remain in compliance with ESSA and the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER). As new regulations and statutory requirements were introduced (e.g., ESSER), the R12CC also remained informed and knowledgeable of these developments and continued to provide support to CDE.

ESSA continues previous federal efforts to mandate accountability and prioritize the education of underserved student populations, yet it differs from preceding education legislation in several substantive ways. For example, ESSA scales back on federal involvement in local education policy, granting SEAs, LEAs, and schools increased autonomy to define and set accountability targets. In an attempt to support improved student outcomes, ESSA also shifts the focus from research-based practices to evidence-based practices and establishes requirements for the use of evidence throughout the implementation process—defining four levels of evidence and specifying the minimum level of evidence required for certain federal programs (ESSA, 2015; Results for America, 2017). Our proposed R8CC team has extensive experience helping SEAs, REAs, LEAs, and schools understand the four levels of evidence and implement a six-phase CIP



process aligned to ED's cycle of continuous learning and improvement designed to improve outcomes for all students (see Table 1, p. 10).

There are few issues more disruptive and more ubiquitous than the absenteeism crisis currently affecting students and schools across Region 8 and the country as a whole (Blake, 2024; Jacobson, 2024; Leonhardt, 2023; Mervosh, 2024). In North Dakota, the R11CC worked with the NDDPI and North Dakota Regional Education Association (NDREA) to improve student attendance. The HLP team, consisting of staff from the R11CC, NDDPI, NDREA, and the Parshall School District (located on Fort Berthold Indian Reservation), used improvement science to understand the local context, raise awareness, and iteratively address the challenge of chronic absenteeism. Though work on this issue continues, attendance has improved, and the district's two schools have now exited Targeted Support and Improvement status.

### **McREL, An Equal Opportunity Employer for the R8CC (SC-C4)**

As an equal opportunity employer, McREL seeks to prevent discrimination against applicants or employees because of race, color, sex, religion, age, creed, national origin, ancestry, disability, genetic information, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, military or veteran status, marital status or any other status protected by state or local law, and has developed a comprehensive affirmative action program. To carry out these guidelines, McREL strives to:

(1) encourage employment applications from persons who are members of traditionally underrepresented groups; (2) administer other personnel actions, such as pay, benefits, transfers, layoffs, and training without regard to race, color, sex, religion, age, creed, national origin, ancestry, disability, genetic information, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, military or veteran status, marital status, or any other protected statuses; and (3) award

subcontracts only to organizations that comply with a similar policy of maintaining an environment of equal opportunity employment.

To encourage employment applications from people who are members of traditionally underrepresented groups, McREL leverages relationships with educational and professional networks that may engage said members. For example, we have made in-person visits to college and university campuses such as the College of William & Mary, and we advertise open positions through academic departments at the University of Hawai‘i-Manoa, Chaminade University in Honolulu, and the University of Guam, in addition to the Hawai‘i-Pacific Evaluation Association.

### **Developed and Ongoing Partnerships with Leading Technical Experts (SC-C3)**

To enhance the ability of its own highly skilled team of experts to provide high-quality TA, McREL has assembled a pool of subject-matter and technical experts from five, nationally recognized organizations with more than 100 years combined experience providing exceptional and high-leverage capacity building services at all education systems levels. Combined with expertise from the CC Program and network of federally funded TA centers, these partners will ensure the R8CC maintains and is able to develop new and ongoing collaborations with leading national experts and organizations in response to any identified and emerging needs across the region.

The R8CC will maximize the efficient and effective use of federal resources by first leveraging the federal TA and dissemination network beginning with CCNetwork’s National CC and four Content Centers, the two EACs serving Region 8 (Midwest and Plains, and Western Educational), and establishing new partnerships with other federally funded centers to facilitate direct access to national and local experts. Our comprehensive pool of partners will further

enable the R8CC to quickly access deep expertise across a wide range of existing and emerging priority areas and topics. For example, our partnerships with AEM Corporation, AIR, Child Trends, Community Training and Assistance Center (CTAC), and Mathematica will offer extensive and comprehensive content and professional expertise throughout the 5-year CC cooperative agreement (see Table 34). Regional and state-based consultants and subject-matter experts (SMEs) who will support Year 1 service plan implementation (marked with an asterisk), and other experts who are representative of the depth and breadth of expertise available from our pool of subcontracting organizations are listed in Table 35.

**Table 34. R8CC Partner Organizations Providing National and Regional Capabilities and Expertise**

R8CC Partner Organization	Description
<b>AEM Corporation</b>	A woman-owned large business that helps education leaders solve their most complex programs, systems, processes, and data challenges to advance student learning.
<b>American Institutes for Research (AIR)</b>	A nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that conducts behavioral and social science research and delivers TA to solve some of the most urgent challenges in the U.S. and around the world.
<b>Child Trends</b>	A nonpartisan, nonprofit research center that conducts research on children, children's families, child well-being, and factors affecting children's lives.
<b>Community Training and Assistance Center (CTAC)</b>	A national, minority-controlled, nonprofit organization with a demonstrated record of success driving and supporting educational innovation and community development.
<b>Mathematica</b>	A research and data analytics consultancy driven by a mission to improve public well-being with experts who innovate at the intersection of data science, social science, and technology to translate big questions into deep insights.

**Table 35. Year 1 National and Regional Subject-Matter and Technical Experts**

Technical Experts	Area(s) of Expertise	Evidence of Experience and Expertise
<b>Lauren Artzi, Ph.D.</b> Principal Researcher <i>AIR</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literacy instruction</li> <li>• Instruction and assessment practices to support learning of students with or at risk for disabilities and ELs</li> <li>• Policies and practices for students with disabilities, ELs, and multilingual learners</li> <li>• Multi-tiered systems of support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence-based practices priority area co-lead, National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI)</li> <li>• Language and literacy collaborative co-lead, NCSI</li> <li>• Building educator capacity in the implementation of EBPPs to enhance learning outcomes of students with disabilities</li> <li>• Technical working group lead on identifying high-quality instructional practices and assessments for ELs who require intensive intervention</li> </ul>
<b>*Larissa Campuzano, Ph.D.</b> Principal Researcher <i>Mathematica</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literacy</li> <li>• Multilingual learners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Led three impact evaluations based on a randomized controlled trial (RCT) for early-grade reading programs in Peru and Guatemala; two of these evaluations focused on multilingual students</li> <li>• Reviewer and reconciler for the WWC, reviewing more than 100 studies on literacy programs</li> </ul>



Technical Experts	Area(s) of Expertise	Evidence of Experience and Expertise
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Methodological lead for the WWC EL topic area and have written several reports on interventions for multilingual students</li> <li>• PI for an evaluation of technological programs funded by the Bill &amp; Melinda Gates Foundation to improve writing outcomes for students in secondary grades</li> <li>• Developed a webinar based on WWC literacy practice guides to introduce educators to evidence-based recommendations aimed at helping students improve reading and writing skills</li> </ul>
<b>*Victoria (Tori) Cirks, M.A.</b> Managing Director <i>AIR</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Postsecondary and college and career readiness</li> <li>• Career pathways</li> <li>• Deeper learning</li> <li>• Rural education policy</li> <li>• School improvement and redesign</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AIR lead for the R12CC dropout prevention and re-engagement project with CDE</li> <li>• Project director for the Massachusetts DESE collaboration to develop a review process for early college and innovation pathways programs</li> <li>• Previous leadership responsibilities as REL Midwest research alliance lead, state manager, task lead, and deputy director for regional and Content Centers under the CC Program</li> <li>• 15+ years designing and delivering highly effective TA to SEAs, REAs, and LEAs to build human, organizational, and systems capacity to improve student outcomes</li> </ul>
<b>James Colyott, Ph.D.</b> Senior TA Consultant <i>AIR</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School and district improvement</li> <li>• Executive leadership K–12 education and school finance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rural district and school leadership, monitoring, and improvement</li> <li>• Served as an executive leadership coach for rural and urban superintendents and principals</li> <li>• Former rural superintendent, principal, and teacher</li> <li>• Leads project with the WDE to develop a statewide school improvement implementation monitoring tool</li> </ul>
<b>*Billie Jo Day, Ph.D.</b> Senior Researcher <i>AIR</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvement science</li> <li>• Qualitative research</li> <li>• Early literacy</li> <li>• Program evaluation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-PI on the LEARN Network Project</li> <li>• Leads the usability/feasibility study for REL Southwest's Providing Reading Interventions for Students in Middle School Toolkit</li> <li>• Manages REL Midwest's Strategies to Improve Reading partnership in Michigan</li> <li>• Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies trainer</li> <li>• Research assistant with the Chicago Consortium on School Research at the University of Chicago</li> </ul>
<b>*Sarah Frazelle, M.A.</b> Senior Researcher <i>AIR</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student engagement and voice</li> <li>• Early warning systems</li> <li>• Postsecondary and college and career readiness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-Director of the National Student Attendance and Engagement Center</li> <li>• Implementation TA and PL on data use to improve student attendance and engagement</li> <li>• Student success systems to support student agency and voice</li> </ul>
<b>Megan Gliden, Ed.M.</b> Senior TA Consultant <i>AIR</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social-emotional learning (SEL)</li> <li>• Adult learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deputy Director, National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments</li> <li>• TA Provider, Capitol Region Education Council Trauma-Informed Schools Project</li> <li>• SME on training and TA focused on whole child learning and development, including SEL, trauma-</li> </ul>



Technical Experts	Area(s) of Expertise	Evidence of Experience and Expertise
		<p>informed care, staff well-being, and school-based mental health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partnered with the Washington SEA's SEL team to develop and implement a statewide PL network of Washington school districts and REAs to support SEL efforts across the state</li> </ul>
<p><b>*Jordyn Gunville-Pourier, Ph.D.</b> Research Scientist <i>Child Trends</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Well-being of Indigenous children, youth, and families</li> <li>Health policy including cultural beliefs and health equity</li> <li>Indigenous research methods</li> <li>Community-based participatory research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enrolled member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe</li> <li>Born and raised on the Cheyenne River Sioux Indian Reservation</li> <li>Work focuses on Indigenous health, maternal and child health, and supporting Indigenous children and families by incorporating effective health policy that encompasses cultural beliefs and health equity</li> <li>Community-based participatory researcher who has conducted research with American Indian communities for over 10 years</li> </ul>
<p><b>*Walter Herring, Ph.D.</b> Researcher <i>Mathematica</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Foundational literacy research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Authored multiple reports and academic papers that explore a range of topics in foundational literacy, including disparities in children's early reading trajectories, trends in children's literacy skills in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the use of predictive analytics to improve the identification of children for reading interventions</li> <li>Co-project lead with REL Central, partnering closely with NDE staff to understand their priorities involving foundational literacy</li> <li>Co-design TA projects that address NDE's needs related to supporting children's early reading</li> </ul>
<p><b>Samantha Holquist, Ph.D.</b> Senior Research Scientist II <i>Child Trends</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community-engaged research methods</li> <li>Improvement science</li> <li>Implementation science</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Co-PI for a community-engaged research study using qualitative methods to explore the ways in which youth-focused community-based organizations engage young people in policy advocacy</li> <li>PI for the Innovation to Evidence Network, a TA network providing services to seven LEAs and their implementation and research partners</li> <li>PI for the Centering Youth Experiences to Address Community Violence project</li> </ul>
<p><b>Will Tad Johnston, M.Ed.</b> Senior TA Consultant <i>AIR</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mathematics</li> <li>Science</li> <li>School improvement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SME for mathematics and science supporting review of items, item development, and framework review and comparisons for the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)</li> <li>SME for mathematics and science supporting review of items, development of item specifications, and framework development providing an educator and state-client perspective</li> <li>Mathematics content lead, Improving Math Outcomes for Middle School Multilingual Learners (REL West)</li> </ul>



Technical Experts	Area(s) of Expertise	Evidence of Experience and Expertise
<b>R. Jason LaTurner, Ph.D.</b> Program Manager <i>AEM Corporation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Longitudinal data systems</li> <li>Program evaluation and improvement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>20 years of evaluation and research experience across the K–16 spectrum with clients that include SEAs, LEAs, schools, and program providers</li> <li>10 years of ED and NCES project management and leadership experience including REL Southwest, Texas CC, and the State Support Network</li> <li>Provided TA and training to 25+ states and districts on how to build logic models, use state longitudinal data systems, develop efficient data collection tools, analyze data, and present results</li> </ul>
<b>Stephen Lipscomb, Ph.D.</b> Principal Researcher <i>Mathematica</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project management</li> <li>Quality assurance</li> <li>Training</li> <li>Coaching</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>REL Central lead for training, coaching, and technical support activities, overseeing projects in all Region 8 states</li> <li>Leads a partnership with Lincoln Public Schools in Nebraska to improve access to honors courses and helps design and lead meetings of the REL Central Governing Board, which includes education leaders from across the region</li> <li>Served as REL Mid-Atlantic's lead for research partnerships and co-led a partnership with the School District of Philadelphia to improve racial equity</li> <li>Directed several technical support projects for the Pennsylvania Department of Education to pilot teacher evaluation frameworks and examine the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on educational and health outcomes</li> <li>Led a project to help the Richard King Mellon Foundation design and launch a grantmaking program to improve the economic mobility of children and youth in southwestern Pennsylvania</li> </ul>
<b>*Susan Vermeer Lopez, M.P.P.</b> Senior Researcher <i>Mathematica</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>TA leadership</li> <li>Project management</li> <li>Quality assurance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extensive experience working with Nebraska and Wyoming as the North Central CC liaison and through REL Central as the deputy partner</li> <li>Supported IHEs with TA to support the use of evidence-based solutions for helping historically underserved students complete credit-bearing courses</li> <li>Led a project to provide TA to the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation to support their strategic use of evidence</li> </ul>
<b>*Olivia Lutwak, M.A.</b> Research Analyst <i>Mathematica</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Foundational literacy</li> <li>Writing instruction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developed the Toolkit to Support Evidence-Based Writing Instruction in Grades 2–4 for REL Mid-Atlantic, which is designed to help teachers implement high-quality, evidence-based writing instruction in their classrooms</li> <li>Project lead supporting two REL Central partnerships. In Wyoming, she leads coaching sessions on conducting a formative evaluation of the state's teacher apprenticeship program, and provide TA for Standing Rock Reservation teachers to design and pilot culturally relevant elementary math modules</li> <li>First grade teacher and literacy coach for students in kindergarten and 1st grade</li> </ul>



Technical Experts	Area(s) of Expertise	Evidence of Experience and Expertise
<b>Tamra Mitchell, Ed.D.</b> Senior Associate, National School Reform CTAC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School and district leadership</li> <li>• Early literacy</li> <li>• Elementary education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nine years serving in multiple leadership capacities, including as a member of KSDE's executive leadership team, where she led both the agency's school improvement and elementary school redesign initiatives</li> <li>• 2018 recipient of the Master Teacher Award from Kansas State University</li> <li>• Prior roles serving as an early literacy and instructional coach and adjunct professor of early childhood and elementary science methods</li> <li>• Former classroom teacher with more than 15 years' experience teaching students in grades PreK–4</li> </ul>
<b>*Jessica Morrison, M.A.</b> Founding Executive Director <i>Southwest Colorado Education Collaborative (SWCEC)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• College and career pathways</li> <li>• Work-based learning (WBL)</li> <li>• Rural education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Founding executive director of SWCEC, a collaborative consisting of nine school districts, two higher education partners, and industry leaders to build shared career and college pathways</li> <li>• Led the launch of multi-regional WBL experiences, shared courses, and industry-grade equipment across southwestern Colorado</li> <li>• Established professional learning communities for educators and counselors to share resources and strengthen whole-student advising</li> <li>• Oversaw the development of a region-wide WBL database system that connects industry directly to K–12 educators and students</li> </ul>
<b>*Chris Lee Nicastro, Ph.D.</b> Content Lead <i>AEM Corporation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher and leader preparation and development</li> <li>• Strategic planning</li> <li>• Organizational development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Former Commissioner of Education, Missouri DESE noted for her inclusive approach to problem-solving and planning, with extensive use of advisory committees and community engagement strategies</li> <li>• Provides TA and strategic planning services to Supporting Effective Educator Development programs and Magnet Schools Assistance Program grantees</li> <li>• As a former Region 5 CC co-lead supported Virginia's Office of School Quality to develop and disseminate a comprehensive system of continuous improvement in their office and schools</li> </ul>
<b>Scott Reynolds, M.Ed.</b> Senior Associate, National School Reform and Director of STEM Initiatives CTAC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District and school improvement</li> <li>• PK–12 STEM</li> <li>• Science and mathematics assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-director of the federally funded Education Innovation and Research initiative in California</li> <li>• Leads district and school improvement initiatives throughout the nation, guides district level educator effectiveness projects, and builds the capacity of regional service agencies in multiple states</li> <li>• Previously served in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools as a curriculum specialist, professional developer, and award-winning teacher</li> </ul>
<b>Lee Rutledge, Ed.D.</b> Senior Associate, National School Reform and Director of Personalized Learning CTAC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School turnaround and redesign</li> <li>• Teacher effectiveness</li> <li>• Personalized learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides leadership coaching to state teams to strengthen school turnaround and teacher effectiveness initiatives, increase the use of evidence-based instructional practices, and facilitate school redesign to accelerate learning in underperforming schools and districts</li> </ul>



Technical Experts	Area(s) of Expertise	Evidence of Experience and Expertise
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Co-led intensive TA on personalized learning as part of R12CC's Kansans Can School Redesign project</li> <li>Appointed by the Governor to the Maryland Council on Educator Effectiveness</li> </ul>
<b>Jenny Scala, M.A.Ed.</b> Managing Director <i>AIR</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Early warning systems (EWS)</li> <li>Chronic absenteeism</li> <li>Student engagement</li> <li>Secondary pathways</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National expert and keynote speaker on implementing EWS, student success systems, and increasing student engagement and attendance, and reducing student chronic absenteeism</li> <li>Director, subgrantee to Johns Hopkins University, for the GRAD Partnership focused on supporting students through student success indicator systems and next generation EWS</li> <li>Co-Director, Equitable Attendance Policy Partnership with New Jersey, Washington state, and Attendance Works to better improve attendance policies</li> <li>Has managed AIR's EWS and student support systems efforts since 2013</li> </ul>
<b>Riley Stone, M.Ed.</b> Advisor Service Analyst <i>Mathematica</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mathematics instruction and research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developed REL Central's Toolkit to Support Evidence-Based Algebra Instruction in Middle and High School, designed to help teachers understand and implement evidence-based practices in algebra instruction</li> <li>Led the data collection, analysis, and reporting for two studies on the Analysis of Middle School Math Systems project: one that reported on math curricula alignment with standards and provided culturally responsive math teaching guidance, and another reported on the extent to which teachers made productive adaptations to middle school math curricula</li> <li>High school math teacher</li> </ul>
<b>Veronica Tate, M.Ed.</b> Senior Director <i>AIR</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic visioning and planning</li> <li>Collaborative partnerships</li> <li>Stakeholder engagement</li> <li>TA methods</li> <li>Implementation and improvement science and methods</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Senior advisor on human capital management and PL strategy and lead performance management support</li> <li>PI for Bill &amp; Melinda Gates Foundation grant to support the development and implementation of a network for school improvement in Long Beach Unified School District</li> <li>Former director of programs under the ESEA at the Virginia Department of Education</li> </ul>
<b>*Kathy Thornburg, Ph.D.</b> Content Lead <i>AEM Corporation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Early childhood education</li> <li>State and local education agency leadership</li> <li>Rural education</li> <li>Strategic communications and performance management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provided TA for states and grantees that received Race to the Top–Early Learning Challenge Grants, Preschool Development Grants, and the National Center for Early Childhood Development</li> <li>Leads cross-state community of practice for SEA executive leaders in Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio</li> <li>Former Assistant Commissioner of Early and Extended Learning, Missouri DESE</li> </ul>
<b>*Doug Van Dine, Ph.D.</b> Senior Researcher <i>Mathematica</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>K–16 mathematics instruction and leadership</li> <li>Mathematics research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leads REL Central's partnership with Denver Public Schools focused on strengthening student pathways to success in 9th grade math and is leading work to establish a math community of practice in the REL Central region</li> </ul>



Technical Experts	Area(s) of Expertise	Evidence of Experience and Expertise
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-leads REL Central's project to develop a toolkit of classroom resources, PL supports, and data tools to help teachers implement the recommendations in the WWC practice guide, <i>Teaching Strategies for Improving Algebra Knowledge in Middle and High School Students</i></li> <li>• Led two math-focused REL Central projects with SDDOE partners: (1) a TA project to examine the root causes of lower-than-expected math achievement in South Dakota and (2) a coaching project to identify evidence-based instructional practices that support student achievement in upper elementary and middle school grades</li> <li>• As research director for the Kennedy Institute, conducted extensive research and provided educators across the country with PL in early childhood and elementary math learning trajectories through projects funded by IES, the National Science Foundation, and the Heising-Simons Foundation</li> <li>• 15 years as a middle and high school math teacher</li> <li>• Secondary building administrator for four years</li> <li>• Taught elementary and secondary math methods at three universities</li> </ul>
<b>Monica Young, Ph.D.</b> Project Director <i>AEM Corporation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• K–20 TA</li> <li>• Educator talent management</li> <li>• Implementation and sustainability</li> <li>• Data management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 15+ years of experience managing, implementing, and evaluating TA, research, and data management projects in the K–20 sector, including multiple clients within ED</li> <li>• Director of the Effective Educator Development TA Center, supporting 345 grantees across seven programs</li> <li>• Directed the Equitable Access Support Network to provide direction, support, expertise, and implementation guidance to help students achieve equitable access to teachers</li> </ul>

\*Identified expert included as HLP team member in Year 1 (see Annual and 5-Year Service Plans Section)

### Peer Learning Opportunities, and Coordination with the National CC, REL Central, and the Content Centers (R-PR1, PR5, PR6, & PR7)

As the current (FY2019) grantee for the R11 and R12CCs, McREL is very familiar with requirements for coordination and collaboration with the REL Program, the CCNetwork, and other federally funded TA providers. Through the R12CC, for example, McREL actively engaged in regular coordination and collaboration with REL Central to develop a geographic



information system map to explore factors influencing teacher shortages in Colorado and provide feedback on a REL Central dashboard to predict future teacher shortages and needs.

As the R8CC, McREL will continue to actively coordinate and collaborate with REL Central, sharing and synthesizing ideas, information, and lessons learned about our respective projects across Region 8 during monthly meetings of the R8CC and REL Central directors and deputy directors. Additionally, these meetings will provide opportunities to discuss new needs and ensure that the R8CC and REL Central work is complementary, not duplicative, and coordinated to minimize any burden on state agencies. In addition to ongoing needs sensing that is a part of our management, communication, and evaluation plans, REL Central and R8CC leaders will participate in annual joint needs-sensing activities during collaboratively held REL Governing and CC Advisory Board meetings, respectively. The ability of REL Central and the R8CC to identify collaboration opportunities and respond nimbly to client requests for assistance will be maximized due to the teaming of their two parent organizations (McREL and Mathematica) in this application for the proposed R8CC.

R8CC leaders will identify and support staff participation in regular CCNetwork meetings and peer-learning opportunities hosted by the National CC to share and learn how others are addressing implementation challenges and working to scale effective practices. Engaging with other Regional and Content Center staff will also facilitate the ability of the R8CC team to explore opportunities for collaboration with other Centers that may serve to strengthen capacity-building services across the CCNetwork. For example, participation in a National CC workgroup on improving working conditions in schools and school systems would be beneficial to HLP teams for our proposed North Dakota and Wyoming HLPs. Collaborating with colleagues from other centers, exchanging ideas, and working to create resources for their use with SEAs, REAs,

TEAs, LEAs, and schools would enhance the collective capacity of all participating CCs to address the common goal of improving educator working conditions.

To aid state clients, as well as regional and local organizations and practitioners, in selecting, implementing, and sustaining EBPPs, McREL will coordinate with the National CC and Content Centers to share information, and identify opportunities to expand the learning, services, and supports available to Region 8's SEAs, REAs, TEAs, LEAs, and schools. Examples of coordination resulting in expanded services and supports include SEA and CC peer-to-peer networking, convenings to learn and share practical strategies aligned to ESEA program implementation and a Content Center's focus, and collaboration to strengthen R8CC staff knowledge and expertise on EBPPs and apply this in their work with clients.

Finally, in conjunction with securing client and partner commitment to implementing the region's annual service plan, within 90 days of receiving funding for its award, McREL will execute partnership agreements with REL Central and other ED-funded TA providers, where appropriate, aligned to its service plan for the region. Partnership agreements will include descriptions of defined processes, such as monthly leadership meetings, for coordination and to support collaboration between the R8CC, REL Central, and other TA centers or providers.

## Other Attachment File(s)

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